Project Policy Statement

It is the policy of the Board of Directors of the Colorado State Science Fair, Inc. (CSSF, Inc.) that all projects approved for participation in the Colorado Science and Engineering Fair (CSEF) be treated fairly and respectfully and with sensitivity to the future development of students in science and engineering disciplines. In the spirit of scientific inquiry, judging should be based upon the project quality and the logical chain of reasoning applied. Also, it is proper that scientific theories be open to question or debate. This policy encourages critical thinking and open-minded investigation without bias. In this spirit, we do not exclude projects that engage in controversial issues and explore these topics objectively. However, it is proper and expected for projects dealing with controversial topics to fairly and equitably explore both sides of the issue and that such projects be judged accordingly. It is also expected that projects be free from error in basic physical interpretation and be ethically performed.

Categories of Projects of Concern:
- A project that has a basic error in analysis or interpretation that has propagated from the regional level through CSEF judging and is going to the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair.
- A project that is found to not be created by the student presenting it.
- A project whose topic is controversial.

It is the later class of projects that will most likely be encountered at the CSEF. A project is controversial if deemed so by a review committee of the Board of Directors for the CSSF, Inc.

Well-substantiated hypotheses become theories that may graduate after testing to become provisional facts\(^1\). Many in the public think of the word theory as a hunch or unsubstantiated idea (e.g., evolution or plate tectonics). It is important to interact with projects in such a way that offers the opportunity for education. This can be effective if done in the spirit of Murry Peshkin\(^2\). That is with respect in explaining what durable scientific theories are like and using examples.

Controversial Projects May:
- Not have SRC procedural problems, so they must be allowed to be judged at the CSEF.
- Elicit emotional responses from judges or the public.
- Represent conclusions in conflict with established and/or widely accepted scientific theory.
- Be topics that address an area of intense public disagreement.
- Trivialize a serious subject.
- Skirt a threshold of legality or ethical standards.
- Intend to garner unwanted publicity.
- Raise ethical questions in an aggressive manner.
- Purport to establish highly unlikely or unusual correlations (e.g., finding a correlation between stork migrations and human birth rates).
- Address a scientific explanation for historical events or legends which are accepted by many as miracles\(^3\).
Project Policy Statement continued

It is expected that during the judging of such projects, that both sides of questions or issues will be equally explored and thoughtfully presented. ProCon.org is an organization that could be a valuable reference for judges in providing background information on alternate sides of controversial issues.

If a project is deemed controversial, the following procedures will be followed:
(a) Judges
   1. Will have the opportunity to excuse themselves from judging such a project.
   2. Will be made aware of the CSSF, Inc. Board policy on controversial projects.
   3. Will use standard procedures in their judging.
   4. Will be provided recommended resource material and advice as soon as possible to aid in judging such a project.

(b) Students, Adult Sponsor, and Parents
   1. Will be given a clear explanation of why the project has been identified as a controversial project.
   2. Will be given positive suggestions on how to make the project less controversial (e.g., making a clear statement of the assumptions used or by including an analysis of differing opinions).
   3. Will be given support in dealing with any media attention such a project might elicit.

(c) Media
   1. Will be made aware of the CSSF, Inc. Board policy on controversial projects.

References Cited: