

## INTRODUCTION TO THE MERCER LECTURE

Jean-Pierre Giroud  
GeoSyntec Consultants Inc., USA

I have a double task today, which is to introduce two eminent researchers: Brian Mercer and Jean-Pierre Gourc. This double task is a double pleasure because I am a friend of both and I admire both.

I had the privilege of working with Dr. Mercer as a member of the team he assembled in the early 80s to establish the basis for geogrid design methods. I was impressed by Brian Mercer's ability to understand the needs of geotechnical engineering and translate these needs in terms of polymer properties. And more importantly, Dr. Mercer had the extraordinary ability to invent amazingly simple manufacturing processes to achieve the desired polymer properties. As a result, Brian Mercer was awarded hundreds of patents as the sole inventor.

To evaluate the immense impact of Brian Mercer on the geosynthetics industry, let's simply remember that he invented the geonet extrusion process and the geogrid extrusion process. We all know that geonets and geogrids have significantly broadened the scope of geosynthetics, and, along with geotextiles and geomembranes, have drastically changed geotechnical engineering and environmental engineering.

With his innovative products, Brian Mercer made possible the innovative designs we take for granted today in the fields of soil reinforcement, drainage, liner systems, etc. And the formula that, for me, best describes what Mercer's innovative genius did for our discipline is that Brian Mercer was so innovative that he forced us to be innovative.


Brian Mercer's achievements are so remarkable that it was very appropriate for the company he had created in the United Kingdom, Netlon Ltd., to propose to sponsor the Mercer lecture series. Netlon Ltd., the originator of the Tensar technology and the licensor of The Tensar Corporation in the United States, approached the International Geosynthetics Society (the IGS) and the International Society for Soil Mechanics and Foundation Engineering (the ISSMFE). I was then President of the IGS. I met with the President of the ISSMFE, and we were both enthusiastic about the concept, which was officially approved by the Council of both societies.

The Mercer Lecture is given every second year and the lecturer is an eminent researcher or innovator in the field of geosynthetics. The lecturer is selected by a committee appointed by the IGS, the ISSMFE and Netlon Ltd.

The distinction of being the first Mercer lecturer was awarded in 1992 to Professor Robert Koerner. Your name, Bob, indicates clearly what we mean when we say that the Mercer lecturer must be eminent. The committee made another excellent choice with Professor J. P. Gourc, the Mercer lecturer for 1994.

Every Mercer lecturer has to deliver the lecture three times, in Europe, Asia and America. Today we have the privilege to hear the third version of Dr. Gourc's lecture. As a compulsive worker, Dr. Gourc keeps adding to his lecture. The first version in Asia was one hour long, the second version in Europe was two hours long, so be prepared for the third version.

In the past ten years, J. P. Gourc has been recognized as one of the foremost researchers on geosynthetics worldwide. He is well known for his work on soil reinforcement, filtration and liner systems. He is the manager of the largest research group on geosynthetics in France, and he teaches the only post graduate course on geosynthetics in France, at the University of Grenoble.

While Dr. Gourc is a bright researcher, he does not forget he is a professor. He likes to teach, he likes to disseminate knowledge, which is consistent with the first goal of the IGS and the spirit of the Mercer lecture. Therefore, do not expect Dr. Gourc to discuss some esoteric research. Instead,  expect Professor Gourc to present a comprehensive lecture intended to broaden our knowledge. He is so eager to disseminate knowledge that he is working on a CD-ROM version of the lecture.

I should also mention that Dr. Gourc is now serving as the first chairman of the French Chapter of the International Geosynthetics Society, and that he is extremely active in the development of European Standards on Geosynthetics. One may believe that such a man has been a firm believer in geosynthetics every since he was a student. Well, let me talk about the student, J. P. Gourc. Unfortunately, I have time for only one anecdote.

In 1970 I had designed the first earth dam with a geotextile. In 1976 we excavated geotextile samples from the dam and my assistant, J. P. Gourc, conducted tests on the samples showing that the geotextile was performing very well. At that time, six years of experience on a geotextile in a dam was absolutely unique and I started writing a paper. I asked J. P. Gourc to write as a co-author a section on the tests. But he did not want to write and we had an argument. He told me, "Listen, Dr. Giroud, you must have lost common sense. Nobody will be interested in a paper on the behavior of a piece of fabric in a dam." He finally wrote his section of the paper, and it was his first visible step in a brilliant career entirely devoted to geosynthetics.

Ladies and gentlemen, I must apologize for this long introduction, but this was necessary to ensure that you will be well prepared to hear more French accent.

Ladies and gentlemen, I invite you to hear the Mercer lecture, please welcome Professor Gourc.