
One in five online scholarly articles affected by ‘reference rot’

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Vanishing web pages make revisiting original references more difficult

LOS ALAMOS, N.M., Jan. 26, 2015—While the immediacy of publishing information on the Internet dramatically speeds the dissemination of scholarly knowledge, the transition from a paper-based to a web-based scholarly communication system has introduced challenges that Los Alamos National Laboratory scientists are seeking to address. “For more than 70 percent of papers that link to web pages, revisiting the originally referenced web content proved impossible,” said Herbert Van de Sompel, of the Los Alamos National Laboratory Research Library. “These results are alarming because vanishing references undermine the long-term integrity of the scholarly record.” In the article [“Scholarly Context Not Found: One in Five Articles Suffers from](#)

[Reference Rot](#),” published Dec. 26 in the *Public Library of Science* (PLOS) journal, Los Alamos authors Martin Klein, Herbert Van de Sompel, Robert Sanderson, Harihar Shankar , and Lyudmila Balakireva, all of the Laboratory’s Research Library, focus on reference rot, the combination of link rot and content drift to which references to web resources included in Science Technology and Medicine (STM) articles are subject. The article was coauthored by Richard Tobin and Ke Zhou from Edinburgh University, a partner in the [Hiberlink project](#), an international effort funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation focused on addressing the issue of reference rot.

Los Alamos National Laboratory

www.lanl.gov

(505) 667-7000

Los Alamos, NM

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