Codes of Ethics in these societies focus on the professional behavior of individuals toward each other and to society. Of the typical points covered in the codes as summarized, for example, by David King*, only one (boldface below) mentions the environment:

Act with skill and care in all scientific work. Maintain up to date skills and assist their development in others.

• Take steps to prevent corrupt practices and professional misconduct. Declare conflicts of interest.
• Be alert to ethical issues in research from and affects the work of other people, and respect the rights and reputations of others.
• Ensure that your work is lawful and justified.
• Minimize and justify any adverse effect your work may have on people, animals and the natural environment.
• Seek to discuss the issues that science raises for society. Listen to the communities affected, the Australian Institute of Geoscientists
• Do not knowingly mislead, or allow others to be misled, about scientific matters. Present and review scientific evidence, theory or interpretation honestly and accurately in which research derives from and affects the work of other people, and respect the rights and reputations of others.
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Perhaps organizations have shed away from strong statements about ethical behavior toward the environment for fear of appearing to take positions of advocacy. “When does ethical behavior become advocacy?” is a question often posed when controversial issues are discussed, to be around mining, fracking, forest conversion, or water use. It is often tacitly assumed that any positions that favorers resource extraction constitutes advocacy which should be avoided by professionals. However, we contend that NOT taking a stance in favor of sustainability—and when necessary, against resource use—is equally an example of advocacy, for it is advocacy by neglect. Just as religious systems have long recognized both sinners of commissions and sin of omissions, so we scientists should recognize that silence on important issues is a active, deliberately chosen position just as much as a voiced opinion is.

We urge other societies to adopt similar formulations, and to identify specific actions that they, as organizations, can undertake to help protect the long-term future of the planet. Examples of Strong Statements

What Else Can Organizations do?

What are some specific steps that geoscience societies might take or expand to engage with the ethical implications of their work?

• Issue policy papers. Some professional societies such as the AGU, GSA, AAAS, and the American Meteorological Society do this regularly, others not at all.
• Build a data base of case studies that can be used in university classes.
• In annual meetings of professional societies, have regular interdisciplinary panel discussions with ethics, scientists, and policy makers.
• Advocate for sustainable use of resources. Identify and support relevant research and application to policy.
• Increase application of science to management and policy, and routinely evaluate effectiveness from the point of view of sustainability.
• Create room in the professional journals for presentations related to ethical questions.
• Is a new interdisciplinary journal needed? New professional society along lines of the Society for Conservation Biology, a Society for Conservation Geoscientists?

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