

This month, we are initiating the retraction process for an estimated 1,200 articles due to compromised peer review. As usual, the process to complete and publish these retractions is likely to take a few months. These articles were identified as a consequence of the work we did leading to our first 511 retractions and in many cases are associated with the same bad actors.

These retractions are all from Special Issues and are concentrated in the same journals as the first 511 retractions. As our investigations continue, we are actively testing a new retraction process that will help us, and potentially others, accelerate and deal with this new era of mass retractions fairly. We anticipate further retractions to follow in the coming months and are moving as quickly as possible to correct the scientific record.

The Special Issues in these journals were targeted by papermills and bad actors, with researcher identities manipulated (to appear as legitimate researchers) and content fabricated (to appear as legitimate content).

We have taken many actions to address the challenges underpinning paper mills and academic misconduct and have since reworked the Special Issues publishing process to close these loopholes. We have acted with transparency in pausing our publishing activity, in declaring that we have actively changed our processes, and in publicly sharing the numbers behind both our first and second wave of retractions. Additionally, we have alerted other publishers and third-party providers of the presence of bad actors in their systems, increased rigorous new checks throughout our publishing workflows, and continue to develop AI-based screening tools. We know there is much more to do and are dedicated to leading the charge on industry efforts to address the challenge posed by paper mills. Fraud migrates, and shutting down or securing one journal will simply encourage paper mills to seek another target. Publishers – and all stakeholders throughout the scholarly publishing ecosystem – must work together and devote substantial resources to ensure the integrity of the scholarly record.