

Dioxin 2003

Boston Massachusetts, USA

August 24-29 2003



Introduction

The 23rd International Symposium on Halogenated Environmental Organic Pollutants and POPs convened in Boston, Ma in August 2003. The conference represented the culmination of a 2-year long planning process began in the aftermath of Dioxin 2001 in Korea. The conference venue was the Westin Hotel and Conference Center situated at Copley Place in Boston's Back Bay. The program began on Sunday evening August 24 with the customary welcome reception and concluded with closing ceremonies on Friday afternoon August 29, 2003. The Dioxin conference was preceded by the annual BFRs meeting which was collocated at the Westin Hotel and took place during the calendar period August 22-24, 2003.

The Boston Dioxin 2003 program represented unprecedented numbers at the time in delegates (>900), papers submitted (750), and exhibitors/sponsors (30). These outstanding results amidst much global unrest and uncertainty were attributable to the hard work of the organizing committee, the conference event managers, and our many volunteer session chairs and peer reviewers. We are most grateful for all of their hard work and long hours offered without compensation in the name of science, the global environment, and international good will.

Conference Planning and Organization

The conference organization took a unique path for the 23rd edition of the International Symposium on Halogenated Environmental Organic Pollutants and POPs. Firstly, the conference planning and execution process represented a partnership between two neighbor nations, the United States and Canada, the first time that two countries have worked so closely in the development and presentation of this prestigious conference series. Our Canadian partners included the Ontario Ministry of the Environment and a number of Canadian based commercial contractors.

Secondly, the conference organization represented the collaboration of commercial, academic and government partners in the Boston Metropolitan area. The local organizing committee incorporated itself as a business entity in the United States with tax-exempt status as a non profit organization. This now serves as a model for conference organizers in the United States and other countries hosting the program in future years.

Lastly, the conference also represented a partnership with our program sponsors – many of whom populated the exhibit areas located on the 3rd and 4th floors of the Westin Copley Conference Center. The financial support from a record number of exhibitors and sponsors (25% of all revenues) was unprecedented. The Dioxin 2003 program would not have been possible without their support. This level of commercial support now serves as a model for sponsorship in future years.



Photo Above: 1,000 delegate bags packed and ready to go. All the stuffing was completed on Sunday in time for the opening reception.

Unique Accomplishments

The Boston 2003 program advanced the role of the Internet and telecommunications in all aspects of technical program production, conference promotion, hotel and on-line conference registration, and administration. The dioxin2003.org web site served as the core of the electronic platform used for all aspects of conference communication and dissemination of information to prospective delegates. The web site and incessant use of electronic mailings and reminders via the Internet maintained a constant line of communication between conference organizers, event managers, exhibitors/sponsors, presenters, and delegates. We expect future organizers will take the electronic platform for the Dioxin/POPs conference series to even greater heights. We are happy that we had the opportunity to enhance upon the role of this valuable technology in conference planning and administration. In fact, the Dioxin 2003 web site remained active through August 2005 and provided the means to relay post conference information to the international scientific community and conference delegates, and to promote continued support to our many sponsors by means of links currently featured on the site.



Photo Above: Local Organizing Committee for Dioxin 2003. Back row (l-r): Bruce Maisel [ENSR], Richard Clapp [Boston University], Eugene Barry [University of Massachusetts, Lowell], Gary Hunt [TRC Environmental], W.M. “Terry” Grimm, III [Cambridge Isotope Laboratories]; Seated (l-r): Andy Beliveau [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency], Ray Clement [Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Canada], Larisa Altshul [Harvard University], Thomas F. Webster [Boston University].

Technical Program

Of the record 750 short papers submitted, 724 were scheduled as platform (314) or poster (410) presentations. This unprecedented number of papers presented a formidable challenge to the Technical Program Committee and session chairs charged with peer review. The paper review consisted of a multi-tiered process including initial review by the Technical Program Committee, more in-depth review of accepted papers by session chairs, and, finally, publication of final papers revised by the authors. Of the 410 posters only about 100 were requested to be posters by the principal author – others were assigned to poster status based on the peer-review process, and on their ‘fit’ to the various platform session themes.

General and Special Sessions. Platform papers were scheduled into 20-minute presentations aligned in six parallel sessions taking place all five days of the conference. To keep it all on time required 90 session co-chairs representing some 12 countries! The program committee strived for a well-balanced program comprised of many new topics identified by the Special Session offerings in concert with many of the traditional or core topics. The Special Session format allowed for topics to be proposed and chairs identified at an early stage of program development. Additional platform sessions were added to the program based on the general call for papers – 314 platform presentations were scheduled in over 40 topic areas! The end result was many sessions on new or emerging topics comprised of invited speakers, keynote speakers, and contributions from the global scientific community submitted in the general call for papers.



Photo Above: IAB members (l-r) Gary Hunt [Dioxin 2003 Chair], Kees Olie [University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands], and Frank Karasek [University of Waterloo, Canada] compare notes.

Poster Sessions. The poster session format was designed to provide delegates ample time and space for viewing the many contributions. The poster format selected recognized the value of the personal interaction for both delegate and author. This dialogue was viewed as crucial to the personal exchange of technical information and networking that takes place during poster sessions and ultimately contributes to advancing our understanding of the effects of POPs on the global environment. As the conference venue did not have a single large room where all posters could be viewed, authors were required to present their poster during one of three sessions on Monday, Tuesday, or Thursday, in one of four rooms within the Westin Copley Place Hotel. This proved to be one of the most difficult challenges of the conference – scheduling all of this so that no authors were required to be in two rooms at the same time, grouping posters by themes/rooms/days, and linking poster topic groupings with platform topic themes each day as much as possible. Laura Biringer of the conference management company and Ray Clement spent upwards of 100 hours on this task alone!

Brominated Flame Retardants. While there were many themes that characterized the technical program, the topic of Brominated Flame Retardants emerged as a central focus of the Dioxin 2003 program. In response to the great interest in BFRs expressed by the global scientific community the Dioxin 2003 organizers selected BFRs as the plenary topic for Monday, August 25, delivered by Jacob DeBoer, as well as assigned dedicated rooms for both oral and poster presentations on this topic. Some 100 papers specifically reported on some aspect of the various BFRs. In addition, an international annual symposium on the BFRs was scheduled just before Dioxin 2003 – it was held over the period August 22-24 at the same venue, specifically to take advantage of the synergy of this meeting with Dioxin 2003.

Plenary Lectures and Rapporteurs. The customary plenary lectures were offered on four days of the conference. The plenary topics and invited speakers encompassed a wide range of relevant topics of timely interest to the delegation. These included Brominated Flame Retardants, the evolution of analytical technology for dioxins and POPs measurements in the environment, epidemiological effects of PCBs, and the environmental effects of selected endocrine disrupter compounds as observed in some indicator species. A conference tradition, Rapporteur Reports on key topics were again scheduled for Friday morning. These reports were available to all delegates on a post-conference basis via access to the Dioxin 2003 web site, which remained in service through calendar year 2004 and into 2005.



Photo Above: Tyrone Hayes [UC Berkeley] delivers the Plenary Lecture Friday morning about the effects of atrazine on frogs.

Student Awards. Dioxin 2003 also continued with the tradition of awards for deserving student presentations. These awards, named in honor of conference founder Otto Hutzinger, were sponsored by Wellington Laboratories, and were made to students based on evaluations by a panel of expert judges. These awards were presented to the student recipients during the conference banquet held at the Fairmont Copley Plaza Hotel on Thursday evening August 28, 2003.

Open Forum Topics. A significant innovation in the organization of Dioxin 2003 was the introduction of the Open Forum concept. An “Open Forum” was a meeting where delegates could gather to discuss a special interest topic outside of the formal conference structure – papers presented were not peer reviewed, nor did they appear in the Proceedings. Organizers of an Open Forum looked after all of the details, and Dioxin 2003 organizers were only responsible for scheduling the various topics (during the Tuesday lunch period), and providing any required A/V for presentations. Four Open Forum topics were organized: *Ongoing Interlaboratory Studies for Dioxins and Related Compounds*, *Roundtable Discussion on Brominated Flame Retardants*, *The Baltic Sea – One of the Most Dioxin-Polluted Seas*, and *Science and Technology in Homeland Security*. Dioxin 2003 organizers provided a box lunch, so delegates could attend one of the Open Forum sessions without losing time. Organizers were astounded at the response to this concept, as almost every Open Forum room was filled to overflowing. Dioxin 2004 adopted this same concept which has now become a regular conference feature.

Social Program

The conference social program was developed to convey themes relevant to the City of Boston, and the role that Boston and the surrounding New England region played in the birth of the American nation and continues to play in its political landscape, as well as Boston's role in the development of cultural diversity in the New England region and beyond. Prominent features of the social program included a colonial color guard (circa 1776) and Irish Step dancers during the opening ceremonies, official welcome reception at the John F Kennedy Library, tour programs of Boston and its environs, and the Fairmont Banquet – which allowed delegates to experience the stately charm of old world Boston. We also borrowed an entertainment feature from the Barcelona Dioxin 2002 program which will perhaps become a conference custom in years to come. A post banquet dance party with cash bar took place at the Westin Copley hotel. Delegates and their guests danced the night away at no cost to the rock and roll sounds of the Boston Big Band Entrain.



Photos Above: Irish Step Dancers (left) welcome delegates to Boston in the opening ceremonies, while Entrain – a top local band (right), helped delegates do some dancing of their own Thursday evening after the Dioxin 2003 banquet.

Some Unique Challenges That We Faced!

A number of unique challenges faced the organizers of Dioxin 2003. Individuals from some countries called for a boycott of all scientific meetings held in the USA to protest certain international policy decisions. Some potential travelers were concerned about the increased threat of terrorist attacks, or the spread of SARS. Some registrations were lost because tighter Visa restrictions meant they could not get permission to travel in time for Dioxin 2003. A major Internet Worm was released in the months before Dioxin 2003, which proved to be a serious threat to the entire conference communications network. In large parts of Ontario, Canada and the North-East USA, a serious blackout occurred in the weeks leading up to the conference. If Boston had not barely escaped the affected region, the conference program books could not have been printed in time!

The fiscal challenge was huge, as large financial commitments were made to various companies for supplies and services, before the bulk of registration income was obtained. In response, a new funding model was instituted that relied much more heavily on sponsors and exhibitors compared to previous meetings. Fully 25% of the total funding for Dioxin 2003 was realized from the commercial sector. It was especially important to implement this model for Boston, because financial support from traditional US governmental agencies was limited

The Dioxin 2003 planning committee deserves full credit for guiding the meeting through the many bumps and potholes in the road to a highly successful conference. The photo a few pages above shows the Dioxin 2003 Local Organizing Committee. In addition to being an eclectic mix of members from academia, government and industry, the committee can boast of three “firsts” for this series of meetings: it was the first time that membership included someone from outside the host country, the first time the conference Chair was a member of the industrial sector, and for the first time an exhibitor was an active participant on the conference organizing committee.

Acknowledgements

Heartfelt thanks are extended to all colleagues on the Local Organizing Committee. The bond between organizing committee members that developed during the planning and execution of Dioxin 2003 is truly a special one and goes well beyond that of colleagues in science. In particular, the significant contributions of Dr. Ray Clement of the Ontario Ministry of the Environment (MOE) who served as Technical Program Co-Chair, should be recognized. Without Ray and the support of MOE (the conference’s principal government sponsor), Dioxin 2003 would not have happened! The support of TRC Environmental was crucial to permit Gary Hunt the significant time he needed to oversee, and contribute to, all aspects of Dioxin 2003. The contributions of the event manager, Michael P. Wasserman, Inc., and especially Ms. Laura Biringer – who administered the conference plan on a day to day basis – are also acknowledged. Laura was especially important to the success of Dioxin 2003, because she acted as the conference communications center, including responding to delegates’ and sponsor’s inquiries (*thousands* of emails!), coordinating technical paper reviews, and ensuring that materials for producing the CD-ROM and all printed documents were submitted on time. Her extraordinary efforts are truly appreciated. Last but not least, each of the conference exhibitors and sponsors must be congratulated not only for much needed financial assistance, but for their enthusiastic and unreserved support for the scientific goals and objectives of Dioxin 2003!

Respectfully;

Gary T. Hunt & Ray Clement
Conference Program Chair and Co-Chair
Dioxin 2003