Dioxin96
Amsterdam The Netherlands
August 12-16, 1996

The meeting was held in two historical buildings of the University of Amsterdam that are many centuries old. The plenary sessions took place in the University Auditorium, the Old Lutheran Church. The parallel sessions took place in the “Oudemanhuispoort”, the place where the university was founded in 1632.

More than 600 participants did attend the meeting. The abstracts were published in 4 volumes of “organohalogen compounds “(27,28,29 and 30)

The staff of the Conference Office of the University did an excellent job and coped well with all the usual stress that is inevitable connected to these kind of meetings.

Traditionally the symposium started with a get-together party on Sunday afternoon

During the opening session the student award in the memory of Ulf Ahlborg was announced, a prominent European toxicologists and ‘dioxin scientist’ who tragically deceased earlier that year. Prof .P.W.M. de Meyer , Rector of the University welcomed the delegates and the opening adress was given by Drs. Ir. R.B.J.C van Noort ,Director General of the National Institute of Public Health and the Environment (RIVM).

A “Discussion with the public” was used to honor Professor Otto Hutzinger, being the organizer of this symposium series. The opening session ended with a performance of young percussionists.

On Monday evening there was an official welcome reception in the Rijksmuseum offered by the City of Amsterdam .The reception took place in front of the Night Watch, by far the most famous Dutch painting by Rembrandt. Transportation from the symposium site to the museum was organized with boats that should have brought all participants through the famous Amsterdam Canals to the museum. However, at that time the organizers did not take into account the fact that global warming already had its influence on the weather of The Netherlands. Besides the expected raising of the sea level in this below sea level country, this day had one of the heaviest rainfalls in years causing a unexpected rising of the canal levels.

As a result some of the canal boats could not pass some of the bridges anymore and had to find an alternative way to reach the Rijksmuseum. In addition, quite a few participants got soaking wet when they rushed outside to the half open side of the boat to observe one of downtown Amsterdam's special highlights along one of the canals. Fortunately, the rain quickly cooled them down!

Eight years laters, participants of Dioxin 2004 in Berlin could see that this problem is now solved in Amsterdam, because the old Dutch canal boats that are too high to sail the Dutch canals are now in use in Berlin where the bridges are somewhat higher.

In spite of these difficulties everyone did arrive at last at the National Museum and enjoyed this social event in a beautiful historic setting surrounded by priceless Dutch Masters.

Although it was announced by the organizers in the program that the advised dress code was "comfortable casual clothes" some of the usual "more formal-behaving" participants could not agree with that. Most noticeable was a well known Californian Dioxin organizer that was spotted wearing a tuxedo, but with the ever present sneakers.

The symposium banquet did take place in the "West-Indische Huis", the building that housed the West Indian Trade Company many centuries ago.

Scientific program

Sources:
Traditionally a large number of very interesting papers were presented and among others the role of Cl, metals, Sulphur, solid phase and gas phase was discussed. But again no final conclusions about the formation mechanisms could be drawn.

Analysis:
This was one of the first Dioxin symposia in which much attention was paid to Bio-analysis, but also several papers on supercritical fluid extraction were presented. A very interesting demonstration by Gunilla Lindström and Bert van Bavel took place during an evening session. In one evening they extracted, purified, and completed the full isomer analysis of an adipose tissue sample on a high-resolution mass-spectrometer. It was amazing to see that within a few hours, under the enjoyment of some drinks and nice food prepared by our technician Han Wever and his wife Roos, the complete analysis took place.

Quality control:
Results of round robin studies and a review on intercallibration studies was presented.

Transport, Fate and Environmental levels:
A number of studies of levels around sources like incinerators were presented.

Non-Dioxins:
A special section was dedicated to Toxaphenes and also the brominated flame retardants did get attention.

Toxicology and Mechanism of Action:
A significant number of oral and poster sessions were organized in which special topics with respect to toxicology and mechanism of action were presented and discussed. Monday gave an interesting session about neurotoxicology, a field that is quite often overlooked by toxicologists working within this area. On Tuesday there was a large session about Reproductive Toxicology in which it was already pointed out that these compounds were lower level and potent endocrine disruptors. Another interesting topic that was covered on Tuesday was the role of metabolism and metabolites of dioxins and PCBs in toxicity. On Wednesday a full day's session was devoted to the mechanism of action of these compounds in which many new insights in the mechanistic pathways via the Ah receptor were presented by a broad range of international scientists. On Tuesday and Thursday two sessions were also organized about kinetics and metabolism giving interesting information how these biopersistent compounds can still be metabolized to some (limited) extent. On Wednesday also a full day's session was spent on the risks of human exposure to these type of compounds. Here it was interesting to note how limited the scientific information was at that time with respect to actual observed adverse human health effects, which is in distinct contrast with the public perception. On Thursday toxicology sessions ended with a full day's session on ecotoxicology in which it was shown that it was still easier to observe wildlife effects at low level exposure than that for humans. Besides these ecotoxicology sessions, two special symposia were held on Thursday. In a special Ulf Ahlborg WHO symposium different national and international initiatives for risk assessment and management were presented. The other special symposium concerned the Seveso incident and the results of follow up studies in the decades afterwards.

On Thursday afternoon there was a panel discussion about: "Chlorine Chemistry: Pro's and Cons". Under the chairmanship of Prof. Harrie A.J. Govers a discussion that took place between: D.den Ouden (General Director AVR, The Netherlands), William Carrol (Vinyl Institute, USA), Paul Johnston (Greenpeace Research Laboratories, UK) and Paul Connett (Department of Chemistry St. Lawrence University (USA).

During the whole symposium there was ample time for meetings and discussions during coffee breaks and the lunches that took place in the Atrium of the University of Amsterdam.

On Friday morning the symposium ended with the summaries and concluding remarks by international experts, followed by a panel discussion and the official presentation of the Student Awards and the poster prizes.

After this the symposium was closed leaving two tired but satisfied chairmen behind:

Martin van den Berg and Kees Olie chairmen dioxin96