

Dioxin 2011

21-25 August Brussels, Belgium

“POPs’ Science in the Heart of Europe”!

The 31st edition of the International Symposium on Halogenated Persistent Organic Pollutants, DIOXIN2011 took place August 21st-25th 2011 at the Plaza Theatre and the headquartered Crowne Plaza hotel in Brussels, Belgium. Morning plenaries were presented in the magnificent Plaza Theatre, a unique venue built in 1930 and formerly used as a cinema. All breakout sessions, coffee breaks, lunches and the exhibition happened at the Crowne plaza hotel, which was fully privatized for the DIOXIN2011 delegates.



The Plaza theater

This first Belgian edition of the symposium was attended by 944 delegates, including 140 students, and 48 accompanying persons gathering from 46 different countries. We received over 600 short papers, delivered as 265 oral presentations and 341 posters, and organized in 50 different sessions. Attendees originated massively from Europe (52%), Asia and Pacific (25%), and North America (20%), but

a significant number of participants were from South America and Africa.

Plenary sessions covered the fields of Environmental Forensics and POPs (Dr C. Sandau), Human Biomonitoring (Dr E. Den Hond), Toxicology of Emerging Organohalogenated Substances (Dr R. Letcher), and Children Exposure to Flame Retardants (Dr S. Harrad).

The 50 parallel sessions of DIOXIN2011 scientific program covered a wide range of topics. Next to the regular sessions, several emerging themes and issues, like POPs in Developing Countries, POPs as Obesogens, Regulatory Aspects of POPs in Food, Children Exposure, Analytical Aspects of New Contaminants, and Chemometrics have created interest and hopefully triggered new ideas to produce data in the scientific community.

A special session was also organized in memoriam of Larry Needham who sadly passed away on October 23rd 2010. Over his long career at CDC, Larry significantly contributed to the development of exposure science. Colleagues and friends had a chance to highlight key moments of their relations with Larry. Larry will be a regretted member of the Dioxin International Advisory Board. His wife Doris and son Lance were present to receive Larry's Lifetime Achievement Award for his Many Contributions to Public Health.



Close friends of Larry sharing a moment with family

During the Innovative Analytical Techniques and Sampling Strategies session, Dave Stalling, one of the pioneers in sample preparation for dioxin analyses, was awarded the Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award for the early work on cleanup, enrichment, and fractionation he reported with collaborators L.M. Smith, R.C. Tindle, and J.L. Johnson.



Dave Stalling receiving his award

For the first time in the Symposium's history, electronic posters (e-posters) were introduced as a digital alternative to the traditional paper posters. This format allowed a more dynamic interaction between presenters and their audience. The interaction being undoubtedly enhanced by the Belgian beer testing that took place during each of these poster sessions. This innovative approach allowed e-posters to be added to the USB sticks.



E-posters and beer-tasting session

The scientific program was chaired and animated by joint ventures of experts and young scientists active in the field of interest. Such a combination helped to create active discussions around presentations, allowing each participant to exchange and learn from their pairs. In order to take full advantage of the networking opportunities, DIOXIN2011 social program featured various events to enhance interactions between students, academics, and science professionals from around the world.

All papers presented at the meeting have been incorporated in the Organohalogen Compounds Series (Volume 73) and are available for downloading on the Dioxin20xx website at http://www.dioxin20xx.org/ohc_database_search.htm

The opening ceremony started with allocutions of Professor Wolper, the Associate Vice-Rector for Research at the University of Liège, followed by Mr De Poorter, the General Director of the Laboratory Administration of the Belgian Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain. The ceremony was completed by the performance from the SOLARIS, a musical ensemble made of 35 talented young ladies who revisited a couple of songs from the repertoire of two of the most famous Belgian singers: Jacques Brel and Pierre Rapsat, but also offered a surprising and emotional interpretation of some of the greatest international classic-rock songs.



The SOLARIS ensemble

The Monday evening welcome reception took place at Brussels Comic Strip Center, a place covering two important aspects of Belgian knowhow: the Ninth Art and the Art Nouveau. Delegates enjoyed exploring this kingdom of the imagination, while rediscovering Belgium's best-known comic strip heroes, such as Tintin (whose stories feature the characters Thomson and Thompson - original French: Thomson and Thompson the Scotland Yard detectives and Bianca Castafiore, the "Milanese Nightingale").

Being at the Belgian Comic Strip Center was also a good opportunity to appreciate a typical example of the Belgian Art Nouveau architecture building, here designed by Victor Horta and built in 1906 to serve as a warehouse. An interesting marriage between the building's architectural splendor and the communicative power of comics.



Thomson and Thompson making sure that the welcome speech was properly delivered...

After 4 days of exciting science, and a few more tours including walking around the Grand Place, visit of The Magritte Museum, visit of Antwerp, visit of Namur, and visit of Bruges, this edition of the meeting, ended up on Thursday night. It was time for the closing-networking diner and the student award ceremony at AREA 42. We arranged a memorable evening focused on boosting interaction between students and established scientists. DIOXIN2011 offered a complimentary dinner ticket to all students. Transfer from the headquarter hotel to AREA 42 was ensured by a squadron of the funny 2CV Citroen cars bravely piloted by friends who were happy to share their babies with these strange scientists... A major feedback from the various drivers was how friendly and accessible were the attendees... quite a good way to describe the Dioxin community.



The 2CV transfer. Guess who was the copilot...

Otto Hutzinger Student Awards were presented for outstanding student presentations at the annual Dioxin Symposium to acknowledge their scientific contribution to the field of halogenated persistent organic pollutants. This award honors Professor Otto Hutzinger as the initiator of the Dioxin Symposia and his continuing interest as a teacher and researcher committed to moving science forward and to stimulating young students and the next generation of scientists. Six awards were granted to 2 students in 3 categories:

Analysis, Environmental Fate and Emerging Compounds (29 abstracts, i.e. 13 posters and 16

talks): Lena Vierke (UBA, Germany) and Igor Eulaers (University of Antwerp, Belgium).

Sources and Environmental Occurrence (39 abstracts, i.e. 24 posters and 15 talks): Devanathan Gnanasekaran (Ehime University, Japan) and Wouter Gebbink (Environment Canada and Carleton University, Canada).

Human Exposure and Toxicology (37 abstracts, i.e. 20 posters and 17 talks): Bieke Van Dorst (University of Antwerp, Belgium) and Helena Nilsson (Örebro University, Sweden).



Some of the Hutzinger award recipients

This year, the European Society for Toxicology in Vitro (ESTIV) was also granting 2 student awards. These awards acknowledged the scientific contribution of the selected presentations for using non-animal test methods in the field of safety assessment. Oral presentation award: Anna Pereira-Fernandes (University of Antwerp, Belgium)



ESTIV award recipient

Poster presentation award: Karine Audouze (Technical University of Denmark, Denmark).



ESTIV award recipient

We would like to congratulate all the students for their active participation to this symposium. It is not trivial for those young scientists to present their work in front of the 'Big guys'...

The final touch was a memorable aperitif and great walking dinner followed by a party at which everyone had a chance to enjoy a last moment of fun with friends and colleagues.



In the heat of the night...

Thanks to the cover band 'Cirque Atomique' for the entertainment!



The 'Milanese Nightingale' of the closing party

One key aspect of the DIOXIN meetings is that most of POP-related fields are somewhat represented. This is true since the very first meeting back in 1980's. From DIOXIN1982, the 3rd edition of the symposium, Salzburg, Austria, one could read from the proceedings : ***"The aim of the symposium is to bring together specialists from different fields of dioxin research which will allow the problem to be treated in an interdisciplinary fashion... emphasis will be on discussion and exchange of information."*** Hopefully, 21st edition of the symposium did not break the rule in allowing protagonists from different areas to interact.

All sessions were only possible because abstracts were submitted. We thus want to use this opportunity to thank all the authors for sharing their research with the community. There is no doubt that some of the work presented during the symposium will significantly contribute to make the Science of POPs move forward.

Despite the fact that this was the 31st edition of the symposium, there is still a lot to do... not only because of the emerging compounds for which we virtually do not know anything, but also because our understanding on many aspects of the old POP Science has still to be perfected. Hopefully, DIOXIN2011 will have added a couple of building blocks to the POP Science edifice and positively impact young scientists' upcoming scientific work.

Finally, there are many individuals who helped make this symposium happen. I particularly want to acknowledge the work of my colleagues from the Local Organizing Committee (LOC), especially my co-chair Professor Adrian Covaci and my colleague Joëlle Widart, as well as MCI, our professional congress organizers for the tremendous work that was performed during the last couple of years prior the meeting. Thanks a lot for making some of our 'crazy' ideas come true and successful.



Members of the LOC

DIOXIN2011 Local Organizing Committee members: Jean-François (Jef) Focant, University of Liège (ULg) ; Adrian Covaci, University of Antwerp (UA); Leo Goeyens, University of Brussels (VUB); Veerle Jaspers, University of Antwerp (UA); Greet Schoeters, Flemish Institute of Technological Research (VITO); Franz Ulberth, European Commission, Joint Research Centre (EC); Huig Vanderperren, Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (FASFC); Frans Verstraete, European Commission, DG Health and Consumers (EC); Stefan Voorspoels, Flemish Institute of Technological Research (VITO); Joëlle Widart, University of Liège (ULg).

Our acknowledgements also go to the international advisory board (IAB), to the session chairs, to the volunteer students, to all the technical staff, to both hotel staffs, and to the 2CV drivers.



The Ladies of MCI and the LOC



The HQ of our two Japanese friends



The one who looks the more tired probably did most of the work...

Special thanks to our two official photographers from Japan: Takeshi Nakano and Yuji Kunimi. They make every single Dioxin meeting immortal by capturing some of the most memorable moments. Have a look to the Dioxin symposium Memorial website if you wish to have a feel of the past meeting ambiances.

(<http://www.ee-net.ne.jp/dioxin/index.html#>)

DIOXIN2011 would by no means have been possible without the support of our sponsors and exhibitors. We are very grateful to all of them for their involvement, and also for their assistance in allowing several participants from developing countries to attend.

Finally, we want to thank you all for participating and making DIOXIN2011 a success. We hope you will retain happy memories of this 31st edition of the Symposium, and of your stay in the Capital of Europe!

Jef Focant – Symposium Chair