

Mercury

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SEA GRANT INSTITUTE & UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN WATER RESOURCES INSTITUTE



TOP RESEARCHERS ISSUE DECLARATION

1,150 Mercury Scientists Meet in Madison

Wisconsin Sea Grant was pleased to co-host and sponsor the largest gathering of mercury scientists ever assembled Aug. 6–11 in Madison, Wis. The Eighth International Conference on Mercury as a Global Pollutant, attended by 1,150 scientists, government policymakers, and industry representatives, culminated in a “Conference Declaration,” issued by 37 leading researchers and summarizing current scientific understanding of mercury in the environment—where it’s emitted, how it affects people and wildlife, and what harm it does to societies and economies.

“The bottom line of the declaration is that mercury pollution is a problem of global magnitude,” said James Hurley, co-chair of the conference and assistant director for research and outreach at UW Sea Grant.

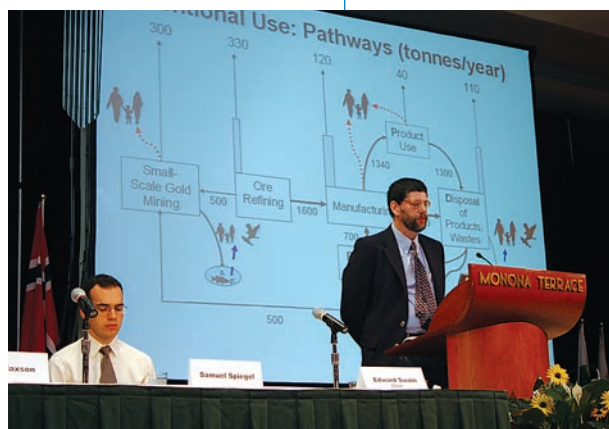
“The declaration was intended to succinctly convey to governments, policy makers, and the public around the world what scientists know about mercury in the environment,” said James Wiener, technical chair of the conference and Wisconsin Distinguished Professor at the UW–La Crosse River Studies Center.

The Conference Declaration summarizes a year-long effort of four panels of scientists who critically reviewed the last decade of mercury science, according to David Krabbenhoft, a research scientist at the U.S. Geological Survey and co-chair of the conference with Hurley. All 37 scientists on the panels endorsed the declaration in full, Krabbenhoft said.

The declaration also received strong support from participants at the conference, who were invited to express their opinion of the evidence supporting the experts’ findings in an on-line survey. Every point of the declaration was strongly supported by at least two-thirds of the respondents, and most individual “bullet points” garnered more than 90 percent support, Krabbenhoft said.

The technical portion of the conference featured four plenary sessions, more than 200 oral presentations and more than 800 poster presentations. The conference theme, “toward integration of science,

continued >



Edward Swain, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, delivering the socioeconomic plenary presentation.



▶ Flag Ceremony

▶ Dr. Komyo Eto

▶ Global Student Art Project

▶ Student Artists



1,150 Mercury Scientists Meet in Madison

continued

policy, and socioeconomics,” was brought out in the four plenary sessions, which examined societal consequences of mercury pollution, recovery of mercury-contaminated fisheries, health risks and toxicological effects of methylmercury, and source attribution of atmospheric mercury deposition.

Videos of the four plenary sessions, the opening and closing ceremonies, and declaration news conference can be viewed on the conference Web site, www.mercury2006.org.

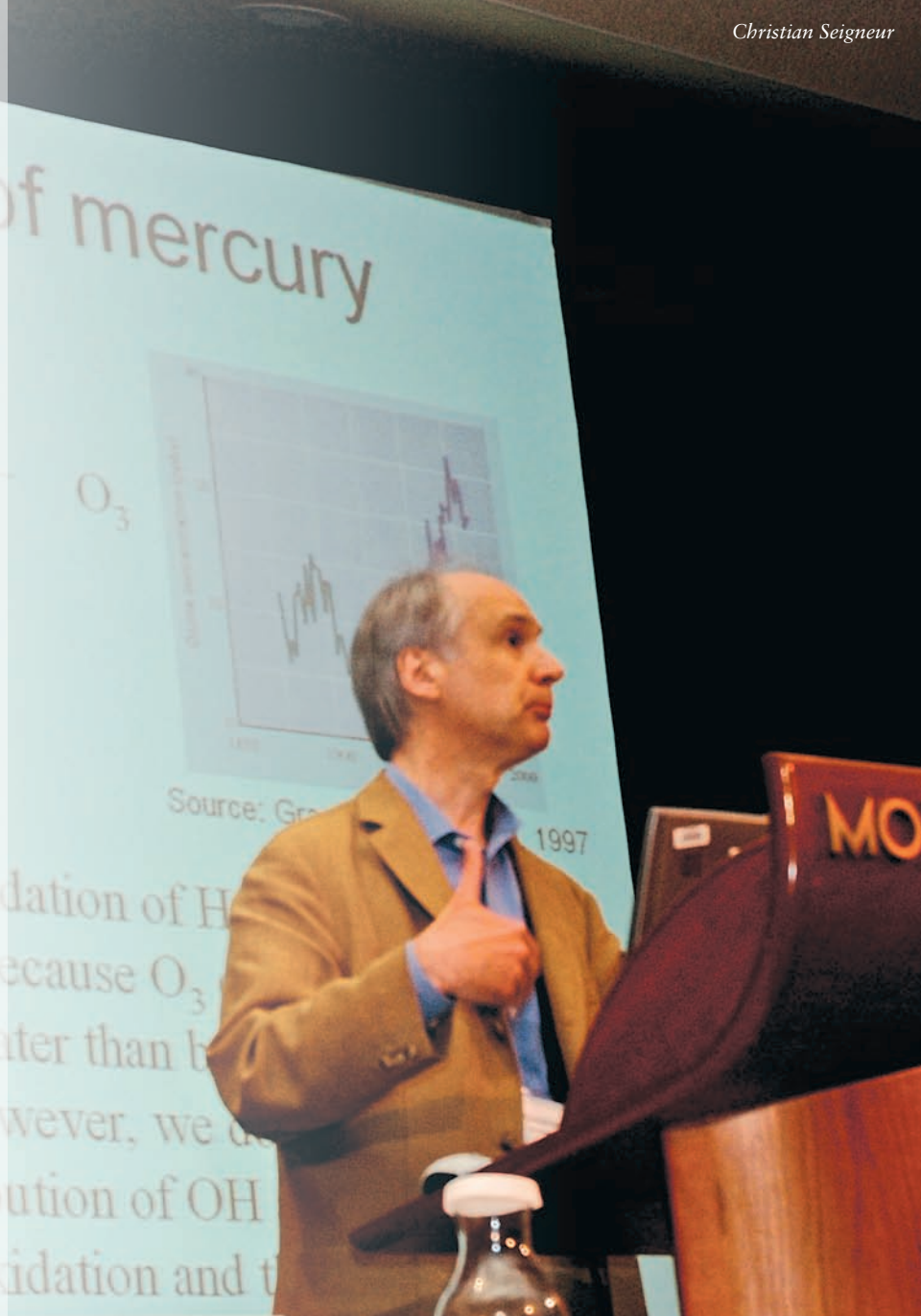
Five years of planning for the Conference Organizing Committee paid off handsomely in the many compliments the committee received about the technical content, logistics, and social events at the conference, Hurley said.

“It is one thing to put together a technical conference with high-quality science. What made this conference even more successful was the professionalism and hospitality exhibited by everyone involved,” he added.

Christopher Babiarz, an environmental chemist at the UW–Madison Water Science and Engineering Laboratory, served as conference secretariat, handling communications, crafting documents, arranging meetings, and tackling “just about anything that needed to be done.”

The full text of the Conference Declaration is available at www.mercury2006.com.

The next two International Conferences on Mercury as a Global Pollutant will be held June 7–12, 2009, in Guiyang, China, and July 24–30, 2011, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.



Key points of the Declaration from the Eighth International Conference on Mercury as a Global Pollutant



- mercury pollution can threaten the health of people, fish, and wildlife everywhere, from industrial sites to remote corners of the planet;
- reducing mercury use and emissions would lessen those threats;
- a significant portion of the mercury deposited near industrial sources comes from those sources rather than from the global atmospheric pool or from natural sources;
- evidence of mercury's health risks is strong enough that people, especially children and women of childbearing age, should be careful about how much and which fish they eat;
- the social and economic costs of mercury are probably higher than currently estimated because they don't consider mercury's impact on wildlife.



Through the Eyes of Young People

In a new initiative for the Madison conference on mercury, young people around the world created and submitted imaginative, vivid art work about mercury pollution.

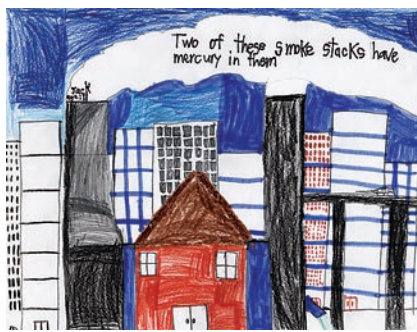


Students from seven countries, aged 10 to 18, sent hundreds of pieces of beautiful, impressive, and often moving pieces of art they created after learning about mercury and mercury poisoning. The

resulting collection was displayed in a video montage during the Opening Ceremony and then lined the corridors and public areas of the meeting space throughout the week.



Eight of the hundreds of pieces of art work submitted to the conference were chosen to be reproduced on T-shirts and sold at the conference. They sold so briskly that, on the third day, North American attendees were asked to postpone their purchases until after the conference (see back page for ordering information.)



Conference organizers conceived of the Youth Art Project as a way of educating young people throughout the world about the problem of mercury pollution that their generation will inherit. They studied the concepts in their classrooms and were



then asked to use what they learned to create a piece of art work. In the end, however, it was a two-way flow of ideas, according to Nancy Hurley, who coordinated the project.

“While the intent was to teach the students, the organizers really learned from them, from seeing the world through their eyes and through their artwork,” Hurley said.

The project t-shirts, including two new designs not available at the conference, are now available for purchase by people worldwide at www.mercury2006.org. Proceeds from the shirt sales will be used to produce an educational booklet featuring the artwork.



OPENING NOTES

The international nature of the mercury problem—and of the people working on solutions—were abundantly evident in the opening ceremony.

- A procession of local students presented each of the flags of the 69 countries represented by participants in the conference. Many flagbearers from Evansville, Wisconsin, participated in the student art project.
- George Goggleye, chairman of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, detailed the significant impact mercury contamination has on the cultural life of American Indians and asked all governments and citizens to come together to address the problem of mercury pollution.
- Members of the Sokaogon Band of Lake Superior Chippewa performed songs and drumming and offered a prayer for children and for the success of the conference and the work of the participants.
- Dr. Komyo Eto of Japan's National Institute for Minamata Disease described the memorial ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Minamata, Japan, mercury poisoning disaster and called upon his colleagues to ensure that such incidents “never occur again anywhere in the world.”
- U.S. Senator Russ Feingold expressed pride that Wisconsin was hosting the conference and noted that “Wisconsin was the place where scientists discovered the modern problem of atmospheric emissions of mercury.” Feingold stressed the importance of making regulatory decisions about public health issues based on science rather than politics or industry interests.

INCREASING PARTICIPATION

Conference organizers made new efforts to increase participation by previously under-represented groups, including graduate students and beginning professionals, members of nongovernmental organizations, representatives of developing nations, and leaders from indigenous and subsistence fishing communities.

More than \$50,000 was awarded to 70 individuals from 24 nations to help with travel expenses. Visa information, letters of support, and orienting sessions were offered for international travelers. Logistical support was given to anyone wanting to organize a workshop relating to under-represented groups. One such workshop was called

“Minority Angling in Urban America: Subsistence Anglers’ Perspectives on Fishing, Fish Consumption, and Fish Advisories.”

Recognizing and Encouraging Students



As a means of increasing students' participation in the conference and recognizing their contributions to the field of mercury research, the Madison conference featured a student award program involving more than 200 student presentations that were judged by 130 scientists.

It was hoped that the program would encourage students as they work their

way toward becoming professionals, according to Mark Sandheinrich, a biologist at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse who organized the awards program as a member of the conference Regional Planning Committee.

"I think this generation of scientists is looking to help develop and nurture the next generation," Sandheinrich added.

Awards for outstanding presentations were presented to: Jill Van Walleghe, Freshwater Institute, Winnipeg, Canada; Carrie Miller, University of North Carolina at Wilmington; Melitza Crespo-Medina, Rutgers University; Maria Andersson, Göteborg University, Sweden; and K. Kritee, Rutgers University.



TAKING A BREAK

Opportunities for socializing and relaxing punctuated the many academic posters and PowerPoint® presentations at the conference.

The Sunday evening opening reception was held on the rooftop of the Monona Terrace Convention Center and featured hors d'oeuvres and jazz standards from Michelle Duvall and Doug Brown.

Many participants let loose their inner rock star Tuesday night at Madison's High Noon Saloon. A favorite local band, the Gomers, backed up conference participants as they took the stage and belted out tunes by bands from Aerosmith to ZZ Top.

Attendees got a feel for other local attractions Wednesday afternoon, when



they toured Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin, checked in at the headquarters of the International Crane Foundation in Baraboo, hiked around Devil's Lake State Park, canoed the scenic Wisconsin River, enjoyed a dinner cruise on Lake Mendota, or visited a farmer's market, a community food cooperative, and a renowned Madison restaurant.

The closing reception was also held outdoors on the Monona Terrace rooftop and featured the soulful blues of the Westside Andy and Mel Ford Band.



CONFERENCE ITEMS STILL AVAILABLE

The following items are still available from the Eighth International Conference on Mercury as a Global Pollutant. They can be ordered at <http://aqua.wisc.edu/publications>.

- **Abstracts CD**
\$9 plus shipping and handling
- **Conference Program Booklet**
free for cost of shipping and handling
- **Abstract Book with CD**
\$23 plus shipping and handling
- **Mercury Student Art T-Shirts**
\$13 shortsleeves, \$15 longsleeves, plus shipping and handling



Conference photos by John Karl.

