

Media communiqué

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«Twin Congress» on the sustainable use of resources to be held simultaneously on two continents

The conference itself as an object of study

The R'09 conference was faced with a challenge – how to bring together the leading international figures in the field of resource management without causing too much of a burden on the environment? The solution – the R'09 conference and the World Resources Forum, WRF, organized for the first time, will take place simultaneously in Davos, Switzerland, and in Nagoya, Japan (seven time zones away!) as well as in Berlin, all thanks to the latest technology. This arrangement is intended to reduce the number of intercontinental flights taken by participants, the greatest “environmental sin” associated with international congresses. A life cycle analysis carried out after the conference is over will throw light on exactly how much pollution the environment has been spared in this way.

Everyone will be thinking about energy efficiency and resource management in Davos from the 14th to the 16th September. The primary aim of the R'09 Conference, now being held for the ninth time, is to improve the material usage and energy efficiency of manufactured products, services and processes, whether during the production, usage or even the recycling phases. The conference is being organized by Empa in cooperation with the Swiss Academy of Engineering Sciences (SATW), the EcoTopia Science Institute of the University of Nagoya and the Factor 10 Institute. Food for thought will be provided by (among others) Dennis Meadows, co-author of the Club of Rome's 1972 study “The Limits of Growth”, Ashok Khosla, President of the Club of Rome and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), as well as Ernst Ulrich von Weizsaecker, co-Chair of the Resources Committee of UNEP, the UN's environmental resource program.

The R'09 is an unusual experiment – and also a world première. The fact that the conference takes place concurrently on two continents, with the two venues being linked by the latest video technology, means that it has been possible to avoid many intercontinental flights. These are responsible by far for the greatest consumption of resources associated with international conferences, as an eco-balance study by Empa researchers led by Lorenz Hilty has demonstrated. The results showed, for instance, that at an earlier conference the 6 per cent of participants who traveled by intercontinental flights were responsible for 57 per cent of the environmental effects generated in total.

“Since the R'09 is all about the responsible use of resources, then we needed to develop a resource-friendly format for the conference,” explains Hilty, co-organizer of the event. Whether this actually pays off will be shown by the life cycle analysis conducted after the congress is over, the results of which should be

available by the end of the year. On the basis of previous analyses, maintains Hilty, energy or CO₂ emission savings of about one third can be expected compared to a similar conference held at one venue.

Simultaneously parts of the conference will be transmitted to Berlin, where a parallel event organized by the German Federal Environment Agency is taking place.

Concrete recommendations for action on resource usage

The “World Resources Forum” (WRF) is also an innovation in itself. The event, held at the conclusion of the R’09 and also co-organized by Empa, is oriented toward politicians, scientists, entrepreneurs and consultants working in the field of sustainable resource management. The WRF is an independent, international discussion platform which deals intensively and in depth with topics relating to resource usage and innovation in resource productivity. Scientists, engineers and economists use the platform to analyze, question and discuss the all aspects of the global handling and usage of natural resources. The aim is to identify economic systems which take full account of the significance of resource utilization and productivity.

The WRF follows political aims — namely, to provide decision makers with realistic guidance and recommendations to help realize sustainable development. Subjects which are discussed at the WRF include new economic frameworks which lay greater emphasis on the sustainable usage of resources, as well as new funding models. In addition the WRF specialists are working on a declaration – a “call for action” – which is intended to draw the attention of politicians to the fact that in parallel with the climate change problem we are also confronted with a general resource problem. This makes it ever increasingly important that political decisions are taken which benefit sustainable growth.

The topics covered at the R’09 range from renewable energy and innovative recovery and recycling technologies through life cycle analyses and eco-balance evaluations all the way to the increasing scarcity of chemical elements which primarily find applications in the electronic industry, as well as sustainable solutions to the problem of the worldwide (and growing) mountains of electrical and electronic waste (e-waste) – in other words, exactly those subjects in which Empa is regarded as a leading research institute in global terms.

Detailed information on both events is available at www.r2009.org and www.worldresourcesforum.org.

Further information

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«Green» usage of the latest information and communication technologies

An example of how modern information and communication technologies can be used in a resource saving way will be demonstrated at the congress itself by means of the latest video technology. The auditoria in Davos and Nagoya merged “virtually” into a single venue, in full HD quality of course. Speakers give their presentations live alternately in Japan and Switzerland and are able to interact with all the participants regardless of their physical location, for instance by answering questions after their giving presentations. “Among other benefits this factor helps to enhance the feeling of togetherness among the congress audiences,” explains Hilty, who originally suggested the idea of a two-location congress.

In addition at each venue two “Cisco TelePresence Hot Spots” are available for spontaneous and informal life-size communication by video link between Davos and Nagoya – one in the lounge and the other in the coffee area, each equipped with large format screens, microphones and cameras. This feature is made possible with the help of technology partners Cisco and SWITCH, with Cisco making its TelePresence video system available to the Congress and data transmission being provided via SWITCH's high performance scientific digital network. Thanks to SWITCH's excellent international links to other academic networks, video communication in this way is possible without additional investment in expensive infrastructure. All that is necessary is the laying of a short glass fiber cable to the nearest node of the SWITCH network.

And better yet – absolutely anyone can take part in the WRF, in a completely virtual (and therefore environmentally friendly) way via the WRF Student Reporter Blog initiated by the Mercator Switzerland Foundation, which went online at the beginning of September (see www.worldresourcesforum.org/wrf-student-reporters). Ten international students will “blog” live from Davos, providing background reports, interviews and impressions directly over the internet to your PC.



The topics covered at the R'09 range from renewable energy and recovery and recycling technologies through eco-balance evaluations all the way to the increasing scarcity of chemical elements which primarily find applications in the electronic industry. (Image: eawag)



Because R'09 is being held simultaneously on two continents, with the venues being linked through video technology, it is possible to avoid many intercontinental flights. (Image: Cisco)

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