

Have you the time for another conference?

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Conferences, meetings, symposia: it seems to me that as time goes by there are more and more such meetings aimed at the analytical chemist. Some are clearly designed to inform and stimulate the exchange of views: others have a clear commercial undertone. Some events endure, others wax and wane, and a few arrive with a massive amount of media attention, only to disappear after a short life.

This article is about one scientific symposium that despite enormous change in analytical methods and instrumentation, changes in accreditation of laboratories and reference materials, and a complete revolution in communication and publishing, has steadily grown and evolved for more than 30 years since the very first meeting back in 1983.

It is the International Symposium on Biological and Environmental Reference Materials, popularly known as "BERM". I first became aware of the BERM Symposia when, as a Product Manager with Promochem GmbH in Germany in the summer of 1992 I attended BERM 5, held in the town of Aachen, Germany.

After attending BERM 6 held in Hawaii, USA, in April 1996—a truly memorable trip—I was, in 1997, invited to help with BERM 7 to be held in Antwerp, Belgium. BERM 8 in the USA in 2000 came and went and then in 2002 I was invited by EUROLAB to join the Organisation Committee for BERM 9, held in 2003 in Berlin, Germany. Once part of BERM it seems that there is no escape, so I am still involved as we work towards the 14th International Symposium on Biological and Environmental Reference Materials (BERM 14) which takes place on 11–15 October 2015 at the Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center,

201 Waterfront Street, National Harbor, Maryland 20745, USA.

This is a date for your diary: let me explain more about it, but first a look back in time to the beginning.

The BERM series of Symposia can be traced back to the early 1980s to a series of discussions between Dr Wayne Wolf, then a young research scientist at the US Department of Agriculture, Dr Herbert Munteau a scientist at the EU Joint Research Centre at Ispra, Italy, and Dr Markus Stoeppler, in charge of the Environmental Specimen Bank at the KFA Institute at Jülich, Germany. They were all interested in reference materials, how to prepare stable matrix materials, how to assign values and produce meaningful certificates of analysis. This shared interest led to a decision to hold a scientific meeting.

So in September 1983, BRM 1 (Biological Reference Materials #1) was organised by Wayne Wolf. It was held in Philadelphia, USA, and attracted just 25 delegates who listened to 16 papers. Three years later, in April 1986, BRM 2 was held in Jülich, Germany, where 111 delegates listened to 35 papers and visited a poster presentation. The proceedings were published in *Fresenius Journal of Analytical Chemistry* and the organisation was by Drs Wolf and Stoeppler.

Over the next 26 years the BRM Symposia expanded into the BERM Symposia as environmental issues became ever more important. The meetings were held alternately in Europe and North America, with a diversion to Japan in 2007, as follows:

- BRM 3: May 1988, Bayreuth, Germany
- BERM 4: February 1990, Orlando, USA

- BERM 5: May 1992, Aachen, Germany
- BERM 6: April 1994, Kona, Hawaii USA
- BERM 7: April 1997, Antwerp, Belgium
- BERM 8: September 2000, Bethesda, USA
- BERM 9: June 2003, Berlin, Germany
- BERM 10: May 2006, Charleston, USA
- BERM 11: November 2007, Tsukuba, Japan
- BERM 12: May 2009, Oxford, UK
- BERM 13: May 2012, Vienna, Austria

With BERM 14 scheduled to be held in the USA in 2015 I met with Dr Steve Wise, from NIST, in late 2013 to discuss how it should be organised.

Since the last time NIST hosted BERM, in 2006, the world economic recession arrived and may have left, but it has left many public sector bodies less affluent and with much tighter controls on what public monies can, and cannot, be used for.

Setting up and running an International Scientific Symposium takes a massive amount of organisation and the total operating budget for an event like BERM with upwards of 300 delegates approaches \$0.3m. All of this requires very professional management and marketing. It also requires sponsorship if the delegate fee is to be kept below about \$500/€500. Put bluntly, without commercial support most scientific meetings would either not happen or be restricted to the very few people who could afford to pay the sort of sums commercial event organisers demand, typically \$3000 per person for a four-day meeting.

QUALITY MATTERS

To make BERM 14 happen at an affordable price Sigma Aldrich have undertaken to carry out the operational and marketing organisation, leaving NIST to focus on the scientific content. The BERM 14 website is up and running: www.sigmaaldrich.com/berm. We would like to widen attendance to include as many as possible from the CRM and Accreditation user communities, in particular:

- Producers, users and assessors involved with the use and production of reference materials;
- Scientists from analytical sciences and all disciplines involved with the development of new analytical methods or instrumentation;
- Government officials and policy-makers in fields related to such areas as public health, healthcare, consumer safety, food quality and nutrition, environmental monitoring, and forensics.

Already there is an outline programme and other details. But as with any scientific meeting there are two key external contributions that are essential to the meeting: speakers and sponsors.

The scientific programme for BERM 14 will focus on the development and role of CRMs in the analytical measurement process, with emphasis on CRMs related to public health and safety including clinical laboratory medicine, food safety and nutrition labelling, human nutritional assessment, environmental monitoring, and forensics.

We anticipate technical sessions with presentations on the following topics:

- New CRM developments (i.e., new materials, matrices and analytes);

- CRMs to support "omics" measurements, e.g., proteomics, metabolomics, genomics and petroleomics;
- CRMs for characterisation of nanoparticles and nanoparticles in environmental and biological matrices;
- New areas for CRM development, e.g., microbiology, advanced materials, qualitative analysis (chemical/biological identifications);
- New approaches to CRM development with emphasis on approaches for selecting and preparing candidate CRMs;
- Approaches to chemical purity assessment for CRMs;
- New analytical methods as applied to CRM certification;
- Validation of new analytical techniques and methods using CRMs; novel uses of CRMs;
- Significant applications and impact of CRMs in national and international measurement programmes;
- Role of CRMs in proficiency testing and accreditation.

So, if you would like to contribute to the scientific programme in any way please contact the BERM 14 Organising Committee by e-mailing the Symposium Chairman, Dr Stephen A. Wise, stephen.wise@nist.gov. If you are interested in becoming a commercial partner please contact the Sigma-Aldrich Organisation Lead, Alan Nichols, e-mail: alan.nichols@sial.com or phone: +1-814-359-5496.

As I said back in 2003, Symposia are all about knowledge and information: truly "people places". I won't miss BERM 14 and I encourage all *Spectroscopy Europe* readers who work in the biological and environmental area to come to the USA in October 2015.



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BERM 14

14th International Symposium on Biological and Environmental Reference Materials (BERM 14)

October 11-15, 2015

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201 Waterfront Street, National Harbor, Maryland 20745 USA

