

Have you time for BERM?

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What do we get from going to scientific meetings and symposia? Why do we go? How do we justify the time and effort, let alone the expense? Are they really worth it?

These questions were provoked by some onerous tasks I had to complete recently, all related in one way or another to taking part in and organising the forthcoming BERM 9 meeting!

BERM, short for the International Symposium on Biological and Environmental Reference Materials, started back in 1983, when Reference Materials and laboratory accreditation were something of a novelty. The meetings have been held, with ever increasing success, alternately in North America and Europe since then and provide an ongoing forum addressing issues related to the role of biological and environmental reference materials in quality assurance of analytical measurements.

The next is BERM 9, scheduled for Berlin, Germany, from 15 to 19 June 2003. For a history of the BERM Symposia read pages 269 to 272 in *Reference Materials for Chemical Analysis*, by Stoepler, Wolf and Jenks.

The BERM Symposia have a very clear and simple mandate: they are there to allow the producers AND THE USERS to get together and:

- Review needs and trends for RMs and CRMs
- Discuss proper selection and use
- Promote harmonisation
- Explore how to improve availability and choice
- Promote education and training

The scientific programme of BERM 9 will focus on the role of certified reference materials in the measurement process in fields of global human and political concern, including food safety and labelling, especially novel food and feed, biotechnology, public health and environmental monitoring. Details of the programme can be found by going to the BERM 9 link on the *Spectroscopy Europe* web site, www.spectroscopyeurope.com.

BERM 9 will include both oral and poster sessions and a parallel workshop: a truly rich resource for anyone interested in or working with reference materials and certified reference materials.

The oral sessions will consist of invited keynote lectures by reputed experts and selected scientific contributions, whereas the two poster sessions will consist of an introduction by the chairpersons highlighting the most interesting contributions, classical poster visits for individual discussions with the authors, and general conclusive discussions.

There will be a parallel workshop session around the core programme:

- “Bioanalytical and biomedical applications of fluorescence techniques”

In addition there will be a special presentation by Kees Kramer to introduce the newly-formed European Virtual Institute for Reference Materials VIRM.

Finally, there is expected to be a pre-BERM meeting of CITAC on Sunday, celebrating the 10th anniversary of the establishment of CITAC.

The actual content of each session has been defined by the respective chairpersons, in collaboration with the scientific committee chair, Dr Jean Pauwels. For the first time, the BERM 9 organising committee decided to award a prize for the best poster presentation. The period for submission of abstracts closed at the end of January, the scientific committee will announce the detailed programme at about the time that this edition of *Spectroscopy Europe* is distributed.

A major topic of the Symposium will be the role of certified reference materials in maintaining the safety and quality of food. Special attention will be paid to natural toxin analysis, the detection and quantification of pathogenic organisms, elements and molecules, as well as residues and xenobiotics, and the development of new approaches to fulfil the requirements of the novel food and feed labelling legislation.

Further important aspects that will be discussed are the need for CRMs for nutritional properties, food additives and dietary supplements. The latter session will examine the international need for CRMs by the regulatory community, the challenges faced by organisations that wish to acquire material intended for use as CRM, and the challenges posed to CRM producers.

Public health aspects will be at the heart of sessions around metrology and legislation (such as the European *In-vitro* Diagnostics Directive) related to clinical chemistry and laboratory medicine and the special role of CRMs in it. Significant input is expected from the International Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (IFCC) and reference laboratories in the field.

Other important topics that will form part of the programme include:

- General trends in philosophy and practices of certification of reference materials, including new problems and requirements resulting from the development a new generation of CRMs in the biotechnological field
 - The correct use of reference materials, and the specific requirements generated by laboratory accreditation
 - The need for and availability of environmental reference materials in general and specific regional needs in environmental metrology
- Authors of BERM 9 contributions are expected to submit full papers based on their conference presentations for publication in special BERM 9 issues of *Analytical and Bioanalytical Chemistry* and *ACQUAL*. After a preliminary screening by the scientific committee, texts focusing on development work will be submitted to *ABC*, whereas texts focusing on quality assurance will be submitted to *ACQUAL* for publication, subject to acceptance by the referees of the Journal selected.

And the answer to my question? Of course they are worth the effort. There is no other way to be informed and motivated to the same degree. Symposia provide a total contrast to Exhibitions, like Pittcon and Analytica. Exhibitions are the place to find out about new products, Symposia are all about knowledge and information—truly “people places”. I wouldn’t miss it: I encourage all *Spectroscopy Europe* readers who work in the Biological and Environmental area to think about joining in.

A visit to BERM 9 is recommended to all analytical chemists, not just specialists.

To register visit the BERM web-site at www.eurolab.org/berm9.