

Call for Papers Hazardous Chemicals: Agents of Risk and Change (1800 – 2000)

Rachel
Carson
Center

Date: 27 – 29 April 2012

Location: Deutsches Museum, Munich

Conveners: Paul Erker (RCC), Ernst Homburg (University of Maastricht), Elisabeth Vaupel (Deutsches Museum)

The Research Institute of the Deutsches Museum, the Department of History at Maastricht University and the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society are planning a joint workshop to be held at the Deutsches Museum, Munich, in April 2012 which will deal with the history of hazardous chemicals.

Chemistry is undoubtedly a science with a great social and economic impact. During the past two centuries, millions of new substances have been discovered, and thousands of them have become novel industrial products. In several cases, the scale of production, together with byproducts and waste, has led to previously unknown effects on human health and on the environment. Growing awareness of the impacts of hazardous substances on the economy, society, and the environment has stimulated new scientific insights, discussion of risk perception, and new legislation. Advances in analysis and detection of chemicals have played a large role in this process. Since the 1960s, industrialized countries have adopted a framework for assessing and regulating toxic chemicals that remains in force today. Using such mean, attempts have been made, with varying degrees of success, to control individual pollutants using scientific and technical tools, including risk assessment, toxicological testing, epidemiological investigations, pollution control devices, trace measurements, and waste treatment and disposal technologies.

The present workshop will focus on the interaction between (a) the growing presence of hazardous substances in the economy and the environment, and (b) the cultural, scientific, regulatory and legal responses by modern society to these hazards. In each paper, a specific chemical, or group of related chemicals, will take centre stage: from the start of its industrial production, via the proliferation of its uses, and the discovery of its effects on workers and/or on the biosphere, to attempts to control its emission and use, including the development of alternative products. The workshop will focus in particular on the history of specific chemicals which have had a profound impact on the way in which ecological and health effects have been perceived. Using a 'biographical approach' it will trace the entire 'life history' (production, use, problems, risk assessment, management strategies, and disposal) of those hazardous substances, culminating at the point at which legislative controls or alternative technical pathways were finally established. The focus will be on the main period of chemical industrialisation (ca. 1800-2000).

Examples of substances that have had profound effects on ecological thinking and on legislation, and which would be welcome candidates for analysis using this kind of 'biographical approach,' are:

Arsenic, lead, mercury, cadmium, nitrates, cyanides, sulphur dioxide, radioactive substances, DDT and other halocarbons (including dioxins), aniline and aromatic amines, benzene, azo dyes, vinyl chloride, PCB's, and CFC's.

Of course, papers on other important cases are also most welcome!

In all cases, we prefer papers having a global or at least an international outlook; national overviews could certainly also be of great value. However, studies which have a regional or local focus are unsuitable in the context of this workshop.

Since the approach to this topic is interdisciplinary, chemists, toxicologists, historians of science and medicine, environmental historians, sociologists, and scholars active in environmental organisations, etc., are all invited to participate and contribute a paper.

Papers that pass through the final reviewing procedure will be published in a volume with the working title *Hazardous Chemicals: A Biographical Approach (1800-2000)*. Papers should be no longer than 10,000 words. The conference language will be English.

The Rachel Carson Center will cover the travel cost and accommodation expenses for all participants invited to deliver a paper. The conference will take place in the Kerschensteiner Kolleg at the Deutsches Museum in Munich.

Currently, we ask those interested in participating in the workshop to forward an abstract of the proposed paper (approx. 600-800 words) as well as a CV. Please send these documents to any of the three organizers of the workshop:

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before 1 July 2011. Papers will be pre-circulated and should be received no later than 1 February 2012.