



News from ecopa

This year's ecopa General Assembly of the European Consensus-Platform for Alternatives – ecopa – was held on November 10 in the Hotel Santo Domingo in the beautiful capital city of Spain, Madrid. At the meeting the incumbent ecopa board members as well as representatives of nine national consensus platforms were present. The president of ecopa, Adela López de Cerain from REMA – the Spanish national platform – opened the General Assembly reporting on the activities on the board in the previous year, mainly focusing on the new website and the annual meeting in Milan 2010. Next, the national platform representatives presented their past year's activities. These presentations will be made available at: www.ecopa.eu

The election of the new ecopa Board was carried out as a secret ballot in compliance with the association's relevant articles. The seats for the president, for the vice president, for four national consensus platform (NCP) delegates and for three 3Rs specialists were redistributed. For the next two years Lisbeth Ehlert Knudsen, DACOPA, will serve as president of ecopa, Tuula Heinonen, FINCOPA, will be vice president, Philippe Vanparys, Belgium, is this period's treasurer, Marianne Norring, Finland, Manfred Liebsch, Germany, Erwin Roggen, Denmark, and Sophie Deleu, The Netherlands, will act as NCP delegates. Thomas Hartung, US/Germany, Troy Seidle, UK, and Marianne Kuil, The Netherlands, are the designated 3Rs experts. Directly after the election the first board meeting was held in a

closed session deciding a continued effort in promoting the NCP activities, transparent communication and dissemination through this ecopa corner and the website as well as meetings and workshops organized locally, such as the REMA meeting in Madrid. Upcoming annual meetings will be held in Switzerland 2012, Germany 2013 and Norway 2014.

Ecopa is the dissemination partner in the EU 6th and 7th Framework Program projects carcinoGENOMICS, ESNATS and Sens-it-iv.

On March 15, 2011 the extension of the carcinoGENOMICS project was confirmed. As part of its dissemination strategy, the project has supported a March 27-30, 2011 scientific workshop co-organized by the British Toxicology Society and the *Nederlandse Vereniging voor Toxicologie*. A second capacity-building meeting is also envisioned. Outcome of the liver work performed in the context of the second stage of carcinoGENOMICS will be available shortly. This was a topic of discussion at the last Board meeting held in Brussels on November 16-17, 2011. A similar strategy is currently being followed for the selected kidney-based *in vitro* model. The project will end in April 2012 and it is expected that at that time two thoroughly characterized *in vitro* models for testing chemical-induced hepatic and renal carcinogenicity will be delivered. These will form the solid basis for potential follow-up projects in the area of *in vitro* carcinogenicity testing.

The Embryonic Stem cell-based Novel Alternative Testing Strategies (ESNATS) project began its 4th year in 2011. The next ESNATS annual consortium meeting will be combined with a summer school; these are planned for May 1-5, 2012 near Thessaloniki, Greece. Within the ESNATS consortium a test battery is being developed to assess different aspects of prenatal toxicity such as functional impairments and changes in the differentiation capacity after exposure to well-selected reference compounds. More specifically, a test battery, consisting of 3-4 robust test systems, covering different critical time windows of neuronal cell differentiation, is being trained with prenatal toxicants covering various toxicological mechanisms and leading to the identification of a panel of marker genes covering a wider range of prenatal toxicity.

The Sens-it-iv project officially terminated on March 31, 2011. During the last months of the project, efforts were made to establish an e-learning program supporting public access to the experimental knowledge base on assays available within the Sens-it-iv toolbox. The e-learning prototype is available online (<http://www.sensitive-learning.eu>). The Sens-it-iv consortium hosted a congress marking the official closure of this EU FP6-funded project on November 23-25, 2011 at the Crowne Plaza Brussels Airport Hotel with the objective of actively stimulating the transfer and implementation of knowledge acquired and of tools developed by the consortium in the areas of skin and respiratory sensitization.



Stiftung zur Förderung
der Erforschung von
Ersatz- und
Ergänzungsmethoden
zur Einschränkung von
Tierversuchen

SET (Germany):

The German platform, the SET Foundation, consists of representatives from industry, animal welfare, science and government. Their role is the transparent, interdisciplinary allocation of funds to eligible projects researching and implementing methods to replace and complement experiments on animals.

Following an initiative by the German Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Forestry, the SET Foundation was established in 1986. The abbreviation SET stands for *Stiftung zur Förderung der Erforschung von Ersatz- und Ergänzungsmethoden zur Einschränkung von Tierversuchen* – Foundation for the promotion of alternate and complementary methods to reduce animal experiments. This approach was revolutionary, bringing together representatives from animal welfare and industry (e.g., the German Animal Protection Association, the German Federation for Animal Welfare, the German Crop Protection Association, the German Cosmetic, Toiletry, Perfumery, and Detergent Association, the Association of the German Chemical Industry and the German Trade Association of Research-based Pharmaceutical Companies) with the common goal of reducing or avoiding animal experiments.

Eligible projects aim to reduce the number of animals used and/or their distress as effectively and broadly as possible. The SET Foundation focuses its activities on the development of alternative methods, on the dissemination of information on established 3Rs methods, on the application areas of 3Rs methods and on broadening the use of 3Rs methods, for instance for training purposes.

Project funding is mainly financed by donations from industry. Since 2010 the

SET Foundation receives additional support from the German Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection. The board of SET consists of eight members, i.e., four from the animal welfare and four from industrial associations. The chair and the deputy chair represent industry and animal welfare associations. The main duty of the board is to decide on the funding of research proposals submitted to the Foundation. Until now the SET Foundation has supported over 50 projects.

The SET Foundation is funding six ongoing projects:

- *Dr Felix Spöler, RWTH Aachen University and Prof. Dr Norbert Schrage, ACTO (Germany):* “Development of an ex vivo dry eye model as an alternative to animal testing in pharmacological screenings”. The project, which will be completed at the end of this year, is based on the Ex Vivo Eye Irritation Test (EVEIT). It uses a self-healing culture system of living corneas obtained from abattoir rabbit eyes to reduce and replace animal experiments performed during the development of new pharmaceutical products.
- *Prof. Dr Pablo Steinberg, Stiftung Tierärztliche Hochschule Hannover (Germany):* “Development of an in vitro test system for carcinogenicity screening of chemicals with high throughput”. This project uses a combination of the BALB/c-3T3 cell transformation test and the soft agar assay to detect carcinogenic properties of test chemicals. The first part of this project will be finished at the end of this year, a further year of financial support will be provided by the Doerenkamp-Zbinden-Foundation.
- *Dr Hubert Löwenheim, University of Tübingen (Germany):* “Development of an otic stem cell based model of the inner ear: An *in vitro* model for drug development in the field of hearing loss”. This project, running until September 2012, involves otic stem cells, which will be differentiated into different ear cell types. This *in vitro* model is referred to as the “mini-ear” model.
- *Dr Karin Weisser and Dr Beate Krämer, Paul Ehrlich Institute, Langen (Germany):* “Development of an *in vitro*

method for the determination of tetanus toxicity in tetanus vaccines”. This project has been co-financed together with the Swiss Doerenkamp-Zbinden Foundation and the Swiss Organisation AnimalFree Research and will be completed in spring 2012. It aims to replace the current guinea pig test for the detection of active tetanus neurotoxin in vaccine production.

- *Dr Sabrina Ehnert and Prof. Dr Andreas K. Nüssler, University of Tübingen (Germany):* “Development of a 3D flow through model for long-term culture of polarized hepatocyte-like cells *in vitro*”. This project aims to develop an *in vitro* model for assessment of chronic exposure and investigation of continuous inflammation involving primary hepatocytes. It will run until early 2013.
- *Prof. Dr Gerhard Gstraunthaler, University of Innsbruck (Austria):* “Human thrombocyte concentrates as substitutes for animal-derived serum in stem cell cultures for *in vitro* toxicity testing”. The project explores the human thrombocyte lysate as a replacement for fetal bovine serum for culturing human mesenchymal and mouse embryonic stem cell culture. This project is funded until April 2013.
- *Roman Kolar, Akademie für Tierschutz, Neubiberg (Germany):* “Analysis of EU-legislation in terms of consistency and state-of-the-art regarding the implementation of the 3Rs in the data requirements to identify potential for further improvement”. This study – which has just been completed – aimed to identify remaining animal experiments in official data requirements, which by now should be replaced by accepted alternative methods.

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