

***Eurometaux invited to the Symposium on Metals in the Environment  
- Research Network***

From 27 to 28 February, Eurometaux attended the annual symposium of the "Canadian Metals in the Environment Research Network" (MITE-RN). The latter is an impressive interdisciplinary research network, with more than 20 research partners. Formed on July 1, 1998, it aims to understand the sources of metals in the environment, how metals move and transform within the environment, and how they can affect ecosystems and human health. This research network brings together scientists from universities, industry, and government to establish a framework for managing metals in the environment.

This understanding is essential in order to assess the risk they may pose and determine how that risk can be reduced. The information produced by this network will be used in the formulation of environmentally-responsible policies by the Canadian government and its partners.

Both the authorities and industry are sponsors of the network. A 5-year budget of more than 1 million dollars/year has been provided.

Eurometaux was invited at the symposium to present an overview of the problems involved in the environmental risk assessment of metals in Europe, together with related research activities.

It clearly emerged that the problems and research needs on both sides of the Atlantic were very similar.

The first results of about 15 ongoing projects were presented during the Symposium.

The aim of a first set of projects is to estimate the proportion of metals loading in various ecosystems due to atmospheric deposition originating from both anthropogenic and natural sources. These will address a major issue concerning the origin of metals posing public health and environmental threats, and will help to identify the most appropriate risk management strategies.

A second set of projects focuses on assessing the bio-available (= a form that can be taken up by plants or animals) fraction of metals in the environment. An improved ability to estimate the bioavailable fraction in ecosystem compartments will lead to stronger relationships between trace metal exposure and organism responses, and will make it easier to realistically evaluate the risk posed by trace elements to ecosystems.

A third set focuses on how metal speciation in the exposure medium (water, soil, sediment) relates to effects at the cellular and organism level. It also aims to assess the role of the quality and quantity of food in the toxicity of metals.

It is in the interests of society to ensure that scientifically-valid methods and approaches form the basis for risk management decisions. Furthermore, scientific advancements in the methodologies underlying the Environmental Risk Assessment for Metals and Inorganic Metal Compounds need to be better incorporated into current risk assessment activities.

MITE-RN seems to have created an excellent and timely opportunity to strengthen the relationships between the authorities, academic world and industry of North America and Europe, to advance these improvements, ensure they are integrated into short-, mid- and long-term activities, and ensure that the environmental risk assessment of metals is harmonised.

Eurometaux's mission being to maintain an open and constructive dialogue with the European authorities and international and intergovernmental bodies, it has an important role to play as a promoter and catalyst in this process.

More information on the research network can be found on the following website : <http://www.mite-rn.org>

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