

Superfund Research Program grantees gather in San Jose for annual meeting

By Sara Mishamandani

The annual meeting of the NIEHS Superfund Research Program (SRP) Nov. 12-14 in San Jose, California, brought together researchers, trainees, and administrators supported by the program, as well as representatives from partner agencies to discuss new research, technology, communication, and community engagement.

Hosted by SRP grantees at the University of California, Berkeley (UCB), the meeting provided a forum for presentations and discussion in areas critical to the program's multidisciplinary research mission, to address human and environmental health challenges related to Superfund and other hazardous waste sites.

Focusing on practical applications of research findings

SRP Director Bill Suk, Ph.D., and NIEHS Deputy Director Rick Woychik, Ph.D., gave opening remarks. They both emphasized the importance of data sharing and the value of working collaboratively to share and translate research to improve public health.

“This meeting showcased a wide range of problem-based, solution-oriented research that is being performed as part of the SRP,” said Suk. “This outstanding meeting brought together experts from a broad range of environmental health fields in the program to develop new ideas and perspectives to tackle environmental problems and improve public health.”

Researchers presented key results from their work during the meeting. In the environmental sciences and engineering session, diverse topics included modeling pollutant exposure in fish, dust deposition from mine waste, and challenges related to vapor intrusion. The health sciences session covered research findings from epidemiology, toxicology, and systems biology studies related to adverse effects from early life exposures to chemicals, as well as liver injury from exposure to environmental contaminants.

The meeting featured keynote speaker Jill Banfield, Ph.D., a Berkeley professor, who discussed the importance of the microbiome to health and environmental research. Banfield is a leader in the field of microbiology with a focus on the fundamental relationship between microorganisms and their chemical environments. David Sedlak, Ph.D., professor at Berkeley and author of the book “Water 4.0,” also gave a keynote address on the need to develop local sources of drinking water, including the cleanup and reuse of contaminated urban groundwater. Sedlak's talk was followed by a panel discussion on emerging contaminants in water by program grantees, as well as federal and state environmental agency partners.

A spotlight on research translation and community engagement

The SRP Research Translation and Community Engagement Cores held a daylong separate meeting prior to the opening of the main sessions to showcase successes from the year and identify ways for centers to collaborate and learn from each other.

As part of the main meeting, grantees described how they took basic research findings and moved them from the lab to inform environmental public policy, to start an environmental detection device business, and to create an urban community garden from a brownfield, land previously used for industrial or commercial purposes and contaminated by hazardous waste.

Highlighting and rewarding trainee successes

The meeting, which began and ended with talks by graduate students and postdoctoral researchers, showcased trainee research. During this science presentation session, trainees explained research related to modeling, detecting, and assessing various environmental toxicants. The meeting concluded with talks from six [KC Donnelly Externship Award winners](#), who described their experiences and results from an SRP-funded externship at another SRP center, or federal or state agency.

Continuing the research translation theme, trainees were encouraged to improve how they describe their research through both scientific and lay audience abstracts for their research project posters. Four students received awards in the annual student poster competition. In the environmental sciences and engineering category, the winners were Angela Gutierrez, of the University of Kentucky, and Alden Adrion, of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In the health sciences category, the winners were Peter William Dornbos, of Michigan State University, and Sarah Carratt, of the University of California, Davis.

(Sara Mishamandani is a research and communication specialist for MDB Inc., a contractor for the NIEHS Superfund Research Program and Division of Extramural Research and Training.)



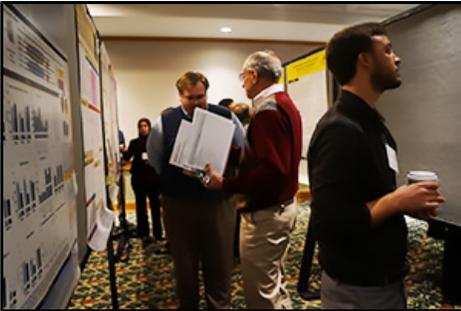
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The meeting provided opportunities for networking and scientific discussion throughout each day. (Photo courtesy of Carol Kelly)



2/10

Gwen Collman, Ph.D., NIEHS Director of the Division of Extramural Research, presented trainee Brad Newsome, Ph.D., from the University of Kentucky SRP Center, with the 2014 [Karen Wetterhahn Memorial Award](#) (see [story](#)). (Photo courtesy of Christie Oliver)



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In addition to providing welcome remarks, Woychik, center, judged student posters. (Photo courtesy of Martyn Smith)



4/10

Martyn Smith, Ph.D., the UCB SRP Center Director, moderated sessions and led scientific planning for the meeting. (Photo courtesy of Martyn Smith)



5/10

The Research Translation Core (RTC) and Community Engagement Core meeting included a variety of sessions from program evaluation to public participation in scientific research. University of Kentucky RTC leader Lindell Ormsbee, Ph.D., reported on his table's discussion related to evaluating the program's research translation. (Photo courtesy of Carol Kelly)



6/10

Beth Anderson, right, who recently retired from NIEHS, helped plan the meeting. Anderson was presented with a special award for her longtime commitment to the SRP at the meeting. From left are Suk, UCB SRP RTC leader Amy Kyle, Ph.D., and NIEHS Health Scientist Administrator Michelle Heacock, Ph.D. (Photo courtesy of Carol Kelly)



7/10

Attendees involved in research translation and community engagement are shown with Beth Anderson, first row center, several of whom worked with her many years. (Photo courtesy of Carol Kelly)



8/10

A career panel was held as part of the trainee session, moderated by Berkeley graduate student Tom Bruton, at the podium, to provide information on transitioning from graduation to the real world. (Photo courtesy of Danielle Carlin)



9/10

The 2013 KC Donnelly Externship awardees gave 10-minute presentations describing the research and findings that resulted from their externships to another center or a government or state agency. From left: Danielle Carlin, Ph.D., SRP program administrator, joined KC Donnelly winners Erin Madeen, James Rice, Ph.D., Audrey Bone, Shoreh Farzan, Ph.D., Leah Chibwe, and Vanessa De La Rosa. (Photo courtesy of Carol Kelly)



10/10

Adrion, left, received his poster award from Suk during the awards announcements. (Photo courtesy of Carol Kelly)



The administrative staff for SRP Center grants attended separate sessions to discuss information about grants management, annual updates, and information sharing, and to get to know each other. The administrators from each center are shown here with NIEHS staff. (Photo courtesy of Heather Henry)

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