

**Dear readers of ALTEX,**

the *ALTEX* editorial office is proud that in March 2007 again one of the members of our editorial board, Thomas Hartung, received an international award: Thomas received the prestigious Enhancement of Animal Welfare Award from the US Society of Toxicology (SOT) at the annual SOT meeting in acknowledgement of his achievements in replacing toxicity testing in animals as Head of ECVAM since 2002. Very fittingly, in this issue Thomas presents his ideas on improving the validation procedure in a key note article entitled "Food for thought ... on validation". *ALTEX* encourages you to comment on Thomas' suggestions and will be happy to publish your letters on this subject.

The Doerenkamp-Zbinden Award 2007 will go jointly to the Academy for Animal Protection of the German Animal Protection Society and to zet, the Austrian Centre for Alternatives to Testing in Animals. With this award the Doerenkamp-Zbinden Foundation is acknowledging the successful engagement of the scientists at the Academy for Animal Protection to replace animal tests over the past two decades. These colleagues have not only developed *in vitro* tests in their laboratory and established a highly respected database of alternatives but have also helped to improve animal welfare policy on the national and international level, e.g. on the scientific advisory committees of ZEBET and ECVAM, on the boards of SET, the German platform for funding alternatives to animal testing and ECOPA, the European consensus platform on alternatives, and on the organising committees of national and international scientific congresses on promoting the 3R's concept, in particular the World Congresses on Alternatives to Animal Use in the Life Sciences. The Doerenkamp-Zbinden Foundation is also acknowledging the contribution of zet to promote the 3R's concept on the European level by organising and hosting the "International Congress on Alternatives to Animal Testing" in Linz since 1991. These congresses were initiated to provide a neutral platform for promoting the 3R's concept in Austria, Germany and Switzerland. The Linz congress provides an excellent forum for scientists representing basic science, industry and regulatory agencies on the one hand and the animal welfare movement on the other hand, two groups who previously had a hard time exchanging arguments on the national level. Due to the hard work of our Austrian colleagues, the concept of the Linz congresses proved extremely successful. In 2006, under the Austrian EU Presidency, the Linz Congress on Alternatives was held in English for the first time, thus attracting new colleagues from a large number of European countries. The editors and readers of *ALTEX* are happy about the decision of the Doerenkamp-Zbinden Foundation and congratulate the two outstanding groups in Austria and Germany. We hope that the award will stimulate more excellent ideas for promoting the 3R's in Europe.

The first outstanding example is given by our Austrian colleagues from zet, who have finally managed to establish the alternatives laboratory zet-LSL (zet Life Science Laboratory). This success is due to the efforts of Harald Schöffl, Walter Pfaller, Helmut Appl and Walter Gstraunthaler, who were able to convince the government of the state of Upper Austria to provide funding for the zet-LSL, which will serve as a National Reference Laboratory (NRL) for alternatives. We also congratulate Prof. Jürgen Frank for being appointed as head of zet-LSL and wish him a successful start.

As you may know, several important conferences on alternatives will be held this year. The most important is the 6th World Congress on Alternatives and Animal Use in the Life Sciences in August in Tokyo, Japan, and „our“ ZET/MEGAT congress on Alternatives "Linz 2007" in September, which will again be held in English. You will find extensive information on the two conferences in the current issue of *ALTEX*.

In the first article of this issue, Thomas Montag and colleagues from the Paul Ehrlich Institute report on applying the *in vitro* pyrogen test to safety testing of medicinal products. Stefan Müller and his co-workers at Merck in Darmstadt give two examples for using advanced molecular methods in drug toxicity testing, which may soon replace animal tests in drug development. Finally, Yalena Hernández and René Fischer from the ETH Zürich demonstrate that fetal calf serum used in the cryopreservation of mammalian cells and tissues can be replaced by synthetic tensides. The new method will contribute to a substantial reduction in the use of fetal calf serum. In an up-to-date review Andrew Knight demonstrates how humane, non-animal teaching methods can successfully be used in veterinary teaching.

Coenraad Hendriksen reports his impressions of the first Indian Congress on Alternatives, which was held in January 2007 in Chennai (formerly Madras), which attracted a large group of scientists and was funded by the Doerenkamp-Zbinden Foundation.

The news section again covers a wide spectrum of animal-free methods. Also, I would like to draw your attention to two books on topics deserving a high priority, i.e. the amendment of EU Directive 86/609 on experimental animals and the use of primates as experimental animals.

Finally, I must inform you that I have retired as of the 30th of April after serving 18 years as Head of ZEBET. I will do my best to assist my successors in keeping ZEBET successful and I will be happy to continue to serve as editor of *ALTEX*.

I hope you enjoy the current issue of *ALTEX*.