

From sick sea lions to cash-cars, science meet has it covered

February 17 2010, by Jean-Louis Santini

Sea lions with epilepsy, a car that earns money for its driver, dolphins and climate change: all are on the agenda Thursday as scientists kick off a major meeting that aims to take science to the people.

"The conference is like the science Olympics," said Peter Agre, head of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), which is hosting the meeting in California as the Winter Olympics were in full swing in Vancouver, Canada.

"We've got the science equivalent of luge, of paired ice skating, of ski jumping. San Diego is a mecca for hot science," he said.

Scientists from around the world were expected to attend the meeting in California, which is the 176th annual conference of the AAAS. But they won't be locked in scientific debate among themselves.

"I feel that science owes the public an explanation about what it has done with public funds, and this conference gives that explanation," Agre, a Nobel chemistry laureate, told AFP before the conference.

"This conference is not about dumbing-down science but neither is it a place for subspecialists to talk only to other subspecialists in a niche," he said.

On Thursday, the first day of the five-day science talkfest, which has the theme "bridging science and society," marine scientists will share the

speaker's dais with mechanical engineers, a high seas policy advisor, university professors and nuclear safety experts.

While details of the discussions will remain under wraps until the symposia begin, just looking at the range of speakers is an indication that they cover a broad array of topics.

One of the symposia will deal with sea lions who are developing epilepsy.

Another will cover a new make of car that can be a source of income, rather than the usual financial drain.

Yet another will ponder the worrisome question of nuclear verification, and one will offer a sneak peek at the final report of a 10-year census of marine life, which has discovered "unusual creatures" in the ocean, including a tubeworm that drills for oil and a crab with hairy legs.

Later in the week, symposia will cover eclectic subjects -- such as how dust in the atmosphere could counteract climate change -- and touch on current topics of hot conversation, such as countries striving to develop their nuclear capability or the debate over whether global warming really exists.

Medicine will be center-stage at many of the symposia, including the one on chemicals that affect the risk of developing breast cancer or another on the projected benefits of testing everyone for HIV/AIDS and immediately treating those found to be infected with the virus.

"The conference is science from soup to nuts," said Agre, using an American expression that originally referred to a multi-course meal and means "from beginning to end."

Most of the symposia-leaders will be from US universities, although professors and scientists from Australian, Austrian, Belgian, British, Canadian, German, Italian, Polish, South African and Swiss institutions will be among international presenters at the conference, which runs until Monday.

According to Agre, around a fifth of people who registered to attend the conference are from outside the United States.

At the weekend, part of the San Diego conference center will be turned into a giant, hands-on science fair for families, and, separately, the head of the World Federation of Science Journalists will officially launch a three-year mentoring program for science reporters in Africa and the Arab world.

(c) 2010 AFP

Citation: From sick sea lions to cash-cars, science meet has it covered (2010, February 17)
retrieved 27 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2010-02-sick-sea-lions-cash-cars-science.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--