

**Dear ALTEX reader,**

we delayed the publication of this third issue of ALTEX 2009 a little so that we could also report on the World Congress in Rome, clearly the most important and exciting event in the development and application of alternative methods this year. It was worth it! The progress presented in Rome shows the way forward and gives us hope for a future free of animal experiments – at least with regard to regulatory safety testing. In his inspiring final talk (Calling on Science: Making “Alternatives” the New Gold Standard), Melvin E. Andersen from the Hamner Institutes for Health Sciences, Research Triangle Park, USA, succinctly formulated the goal: to redefine the toxicity testing gold standard, moving toward a standard that focuses on human biology and perturbations of human toxicity pathways *in vitro*. At last toxicologists can openly recognize animal experiments as a temporary, makeshift solution that should be phased out as soon as possible – a liberating experience. Twenty-five years ago, when the first issue of ALTEX was published in December 1984, such a statement would have led to one being disinvented from any international congress.

The neat catch-phrase “do it *in vitro*” does not encompass all current progress and hope: Two articles in this issue deal with information that can be gained from *in silico* approaches. In the “Food for thought ...” series Thomas Hartung and Sebastian Hoffmann discuss the opportunities that computer-based methods offer and come to the conclusion that “*in silico* tools have a bright future in toxicology”. A similar conclusion was already drawn by Angelo Vedani from the Biografik-Labor 3R in Basel 25 years ago, and since then he has not tired of publishing his *in silico* prediction models in ALTEX at regular intervals. We thank him not only for his excellent articles but also for his courage in joining forces with Christoph Reinhardt to found the journal “*Alternativen zu Tierexperimenten*,” today’s ALTEX.

Sadly, one central figure in the founding of ALTEX passed away only a few weeks ago. The journalist Susi Goll, who from the start contributed articles that critically questioned animal experiments, succumbed to cancer on the 10th of August 2009. Only a week before her death she was excited about the news that ALTEX has become the official journal of CAAT in the USA and will also become the journal of CAAT Europe. Susi’s joy was tainted only by a little regret that ALTEX was not able to anchor the 3R idea in the German animal protection scene. But more on that elsewhere.

The t⁴ article by Costanza Rovida and Thomas Hartung already had drawn great attention even before we went to press. A shortened version, which appeared in the journal *Nature*, caused much excitement. The European Chemicals Agency ECHA immediately published a press release, and we stopped our printers to include the full text in this issue, placed directly after the article. We will keep you updated on this controversy

regarding the number of animals that will be required for REACH.

Ina Hagelschuer and co-authors discuss a procedure called “luminescent imaging technology” for basic research, which will make a significant contribution to reducing the animal numbers in this area.

In two short communications Olavi Pelkonen et al. report on preliminary results of a comparison of the metabolic stability of live cell homogenates from humans and from rats, which were gained in an ECVAM/ICCVAM validation study and Richard Vogel provides an overview of the status of the alternative methods required by the European Cosmetics Directive.

We are very pleased about the position statement of the ethics committees of the Swiss Academies of Medical Sciences and Natural Sciences on aspects of animal protection with regard to interspecies crosses. We have included the full original text. The statement will also appear in German in ALTEXethik in December 09.

The news part of this issue is of course dominated by the Congress Report of WC7 in Rome. Many other news items are also connected to Rome, either because some of the many prizes were awarded in Rome or because surprise announcements, such as the founding of a sixth Doerenkamp Chair, this one in India, were discussed in Rome.

Last but not least, an ALTEX-related announcement: the article “The biological and ethical basis of the use of human embryonic stem cells for *in vitro* test systems or cell therapy” by Marcel Leist et al., published in ALTEX 3/2008, was chosen for the ALTEX Prize 2009 by the editorial office and the advisory committee. An honorary certificate will also be presented to Thomas Hartung for his “Food for thought ...” series. By the way, we are proud that this series is further improving the citation index of ALTEX. We heartily congratulate all laureates listed in this issue.

In addition to the “CAATfeed” series, ALTEX also will run regular updates from NICEATM/ICCVAM and IIVS. We look forward to keeping you up to date with relevant news from both sides of the Atlantic.

A further leap forward is planned for ALTEX with the establishment of a second non-European editorial office in India. We look forward to a productive collaboration with our Indian colleagues. More about that in the next issue.

Hoping you enjoy this issue

Franz P. Gruber