
20th anniversary and new location of the SPARC International Project Office

SPARC Office for research coordination now at ETH Zurich

Zurich, 2 February 2012. **The international project for atmospheric and climate research SPARC (Stratospheric Processes And their Role in Climate) relocated its coordination centre from Canada to Switzerland. On 7 February 2012, SPARC celebrates the inauguration of its new office at ETH Zurich and its 20th anniversary.**

SPARC is a core project of the World Climate Research Programme (WCRP). It coordinates research worldwide on the stratosphere, the atmospheric layer in 15 to 50 km altitude. Founded in 1992, SPARC significantly contributed to the present-day knowledge of chemical and physical processes in the atmosphere and, by doing so helped to improve global prediction models for ozone and climate.

Relocating the SPARC coordination centre from Toronto to Zurich bears great opportunities for Switzerland. "Swiss scientists are at the forefront of atmospheric and climate research and have contributed to the SPARC project from the very beginning. Having the SPARC International Project Office in Zurich will help to strengthen Switzerland's role in international research," said Johannes Staehelin, Director of the SPARC Office and Professor at the Institute of Atmospheric and Climate Science at ETH Zurich. The SPARC Office in Zurich is sponsored by ETH Zurich, the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN), the Federal Office of Meteorology and Climatology MeteoSwiss, and WCRP. In addition, the Swiss National Science Foundation funds the position of a young researcher working at the office.

Improving our understanding of the atmosphere

Twenty years ago, when the SPARC project was launched, the ozone hole and thinning of the ozone layer in temperate latitudes emerged as much discussed topics in research and among the public. SPARC coordinates research on interactions between the ozone layer and climate. Apart from ozone, SPARC aims to improve our understanding of other components in the stratosphere, including gases containing chlorine and bromide which result from industrial processes and nitrous oxide originating from farming, water vapour and atmospheric dust as well as small particles from volcanic eruptions. Interactions between atmospheric chemistry, dynamics and climate are at the heart of SPARC research. Many of the SPARC researchers are therefore contributors to the fifth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), to be published in 2014.

Interactions that challenge us

SPARC research will become even more important in the future because interactions between air pollution prevention and climate protection appear to have different motivations. “For example, we purify the air by eliminating fine dust and, by doing so improve air quality – this, however, appears to have a negative impact on climate. And: we foster the restoration of the ozone layer and improve its capability to protect us against harmful UV radiation – ozone, however, is itself a potent greenhouse gas, which enhances the present climate change”, said Thomas Peter, Co-Chair of the SPARC scientific steering group during the past five years and Professor for Atmospheric Chemistry at ETH Zurich. More and more SPARC research will not only focus on chemistry-climate interactions in the stratosphere but also extend its focus downwards into the troposphere, the lowermost atmospheric layer.

The celebrations of the SPARC 20th anniversary and inauguration of its new International Project Office will take place at the main building of ETH Zurich, on 7 February 2012. Addresses will be held by: Prof. R. Eichler, President of ETH Zurich; Prof. P. Edwards, Head of Department of Environmental Systems Science, ETH Zurich; Dr. A. Rubli, Head International Affairs Division, Federal Office of Meteorology and Climatology MeteoSwiss; Dr. P. Filliger, Head of Section Climate, Federal Office for the Environment; Dr. G. Asrar, Director, World Climate Research Programme.

Find information on the SPARC project at: <http://www.sparc-climate.org>

Further information:

SPARC

Prof. Johannes Staehelin

Director SPARC

Phone: +41 44 633 2748

johannes.staehlin@sparc-climate.org

SPARC

Dr. Carolin Arndt

Science Communication Manager

Phone: +41 79 572 6385

carolin.arndt@sparc-climate.org