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SHOULD WE WEBCAST FROM THE GOLDSCHMIDT CONFERENCE?



Marty Goldhaber,
President

The Goldschmidt Conference has become one of the top, if not the top, geochemical meetings in the world. As Alex Halliday, president of the European Association for Geochemistry (EAG), stressed to the joint meeting of the GS and EAG boards of directors in Vancouver, assuring the future of this conference is a trust that we must take very seriously. The importance of the meeting and its growing size and complexity require us to plan further and further into the future. Preparations for the 2009 and 2010 conferences in Davos and Knoxville are at advanced stages, and we

are now seriously looking at 2011, 2012, and beyond. In that light, we need to take the long view of issues that may affect our meeting. Thus, I would like to look specifically at trends associated with the desire to make our meeting more accessible in the light of increasing travel costs.

The person-to-person exchange of ideas is a critical function of our conferences, so travel is a particularly important consideration. Yet travel, especially internationally, is becoming increasingly expensive. In recent months, increasing fuel costs have negatively influenced air travel. Although, as I write this, the per barrel price of oil has dropped to below \$50, the likelihood is that over the long term, rapidly increasing demand in industrializing countries and general population growth, together with the prospect of reaching peak oil production, will drive oil prices higher once again. Some analysts predict the peak of world oil production will occur around 2020 (although the timing is controversial).

So what does the future of the Goldschmidt Conference have to do with "webcasting," as announced in the title of this piece? For many organizations around the world, the Internet is starting to offer a very appealing alternative to travel for exchange of information. This was emphasized for me when one of our members sent an e-mail suggesting we view live webcasts from the Division for Planetary Sciences of the American Astronomical Society meeting in Ithaca, New York, USA. The webcasts were of a very high quality, unlike the sketchy, jerky pictures that some may associate with webcasting. There were several viewing panes for each talk, so that the viewer could simultaneously see and hear the speaker and view the PowerPoint slides. The capability exists for those watching remotely to submit questions to the presenter. Three parallel sessions were streamed over five days. Based on talking with several folks in leadership positions with the Planetary Sciences Division and local meeting organizers, the overall feedback from the webcasting experiment was highly positive. There are issues about archiving talks that contain information embargoed pending publication, so these talks were not archived. Altogether, there were 6500 hits for these webcasts, although perhaps 40% were from attendees onsite. Probably a number of the onsite hits were from people viewing a talk that they could not attend because of a scheduling conflict with a competing session. Based on the overall numbers, many scientists were able to view, either in real time or as part of the archive, presentations that they would not have otherwise seen.

Driven by some of the above considerations, the board of directors of the Geochemical Society exchanged ideas on webcasting from the Goldschmidt Conference. Most members were supportive. However, some raised concerns that the camera would inhibit presenters. Others suggested that the presentations should only be archived for a limited period. Time-limited archiving would allow viewing by those who could not attend the meeting or a given talk, but would keep the more

informal and potentially speculative nature of conference presentations (relative to publications) intact. There seemed to be some agreement that major talks given in plenary sessions and award ceremonies were potentially a useful focus for webcasting and archiving. This has been the strategy of the American Geophysical Union, which has webcast its featured lectures since 2003 (www.agu.org/meetings/webcast.shtml). It is appealing to be able to make at least portions of our Goldschmidt program available to those who cannot attend because they have teaching or other commitments, or simply because of lack of access to travel funds.

Of course, the cost of implementation will be an important consideration. Some sense of the costs comes from the Geological Society of America (GSA), which webcast five major events during their recent annual meeting in Houston, Texas. Based on discussions with the GSA meeting planning staff and the audiovisual subcontractor, the total cost was \$5700, plus some additional charges for the camera and labor. The Division for Planetary Sciences spent under \$40,000 to webcast their multiple sessions. These numbers are within reach for a conference whose overall budget is well over a million dollars.

There are many positive aspects to webcasting from the Goldschmidt, but if we ultimately want to implement an extensive webcasting agenda, we will also need to address the potential for a negative financial impact on the meeting. The overall budget for a Goldschmidt is subject to many uncertainties, but projecting the overall attendance is one of the most important variables. In order to make the meeting financially successful, the meeting organizers must make financial projections far in advance of the meeting date. Adding the uncertain impact of webcasting on meeting attendance on top of other financial uncertainties is not feasible without detailed long-range planning. For that reason, external webcasting will not be done from the Davos meeting in 2009.

Nevertheless, as noted above, the likelihood is that transportation costs will increase over time, perhaps dramatically. Furthermore, environmental considerations may start to weigh more heavily on people's travel decisions (for example, see discussions at www.nature.com/nature/journal/v455/n7217/full/4551175a.html and www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/full/318/5847/36). It is time to begin planning for webcasting from future Goldschmidt Conferences in 2010 and beyond. Perhaps we can start with webcasting and archiving the major addresses at these future meetings. For the Knoxville meeting in 2010, we might look into limiting web access to scientists and students from economically disadvantaged countries who would not otherwise be able to attend. However, eventually, we should develop a viable strategy for presenting the entire program on the web. Webcasting of meetings is definitely in our future. Thinking even further ahead, as Judith Parish described in her presidential address to the Geological Society of America, we may someday all attend virtual meetings as our avatars.

Marty Goldhaber, President of the
Geochemical Society

HAVE YOU RENEWED YET?

If you haven't renewed your membership for 2009 yet, this will be your last issue of *Elements*. Renewing is very easy with the secure online membership form on our website: www.geochemsoc.org. And please recommend a Geochemical Society membership to your colleagues and students. You'd be surprised how many are not members and are missing out on all the advantages of membership. Annual dues are only US\$30 for professionals and US\$10 for students.

OUR VOLATILE PLANET

GOLDSCHMIDT 2009

Davos, Switzerland • June 21–26, 2009

Goldschmidt is the premier annual meeting in geochemistry. For its 19th year, it will be held at the Congress Centre in Davos, Switzerland. Founded in the thirteenth century, Davos is set in the breathtaking mountain landscape of the Grisons Alps. The Organizing Committee invites you to come and discover the town's unique blend of landscape, architecture, sporting and urban delights.

Scientific Program

This year the conference will focus on past, contemporary and future challenges to the Earth's resources and environment. There will be 21 themes and over 100 sessions. Plenary talks will be given by **Mark Harrison, Charles T. Prewitt, Susan Stipp, Susan Trumbore** and others.

The Earth's Future

High-profile speakers will give special talks and participate in panel discussions on Wednesday, June 24, highlighting the future of geochemistry in its global context. Speakers include **Sir David King, Veerabhadran Ramanathan** and **Bill Chameides**.

Field Trips and Workshops

Several field trips and workshops will run in conjunction with *Goldschmidt* 2009. Book early because places are limited.



Kirchner Museum

IMPORTANT DATES

Early registration closes on
May 1, 2009.

Abstract submission is now closed.

See the official website
for all details:

www.goldschmidt2009.org

The Venue

Most famous for hosting the World Economic Forum, Davos is also known as a place for exhilarating summer sports and hiking. Other entertainments include the museums, shopping, golf course, casino, brewery, spa centre and even horse-drawn carriages.

Located within easy reach of accommodation, shops and restaurants, the Congress Centre has over 35 years of experience in hosting international conferences, including *Goldschmidt* 2002. Reliable public transportation connects Davos to cities in Switzerland and Europe, and with thousands of beds available there is something to suit every budget, from self-catering accommodation to five-star hotels.

Social Program

All delegates are warmly invited to attend the **Welcome Reception and Conference Dinner**. The Conference Dinner will be held at the spacious Ice Stadium, a short walk from the Congress Centre. This event will feature music and dancing. Space is limited, so be sure to purchase your Conference Dinner tickets on the online registration form.

Goldschmidt 2009 Travel Grants

A limited number of travel grants are available to students and low-economy delegates attending the *Goldschmidt* Conference in Davos. Please visit www.geochemsoc.org/programs/goldschmidttravelgrants/ for details on how to apply. The application deadline is March 18, 2009.



The Grisons Alps



Family hiking



Congress Centre



There are nearly 100 restaurants serving Swiss and international cuisine.



www.goldschmidt2009.org