OC parameter Flash – News from the Oeschger Centre

The Oeschger Centre for Climate Change Research puts a focus on interdisciplinary research beyond natural sciences. The two researchers who last joined the OCCR are Philippe Thalmann, an economist and Karin Ingold, a political scientist.

Successful Symposium on Documentary Data
The symposium The Relevance of Historical Documentary Data for the Debate about Climate and Natural Hazards on 3 May 2012 at the University of Bern caused much interest with researchers and practitioners involved in the management of natural risks. More than 70 persons attended the lectures and workshops organized by the OCCR and the Swiss GCOS (Global Climate Observing System) office. The event provided the platform for the public launch of Euro-Clim-Hist (www.euroclimhist.ch), an online database developed at the OCCR by Christian Pfister and colleagues. This unique tool allows the interested public to access 120'000 entries on past climate and extreme events since 1550 which were gathered from historical documents. For the presentations given at the symposium see: www.oeschger.unibe.ch/events/conferences/euroclimhist/presentations_de.html

New researchers join the OCCR
Philippe Thalmann is the OCCR’s first Adjunct Researcher. He is a professor of economy and works at the Economics and Environmental Management Laboratory of ETH Lausanne. His research focuses on economics and costs of climate change, economic instruments and its acceptance as well as mitigation and adaptation. Karin Ingold heads the OCCR’s group for Environmental Policy Analysis. She is a political scientist and works as an assistant professor at the Institute of Political Science at the University of Bern. She is interested in the analysis and design of policy processes and instruments.

OCR publications provide important new insight
The transition from a glacial to an interglacial state is governed by a complex system of feedbacks such as the change in the atmospheric CO₂. OCCR researchers Jochen Schmitt et al., in a Science publication, provide important new carbon isotopic data that help to explain these changes. The primary challenge the researchers of the division for Climate and Environmental Physics at the University of Bern had to overcome were technical. Samples from ice cores are small, making it difficult to make precise measurements. Jochen Schmitt and colleagues refined the existing technique of sublimating ice and coupled it with a sensitive mass spectrometer to measure isotope ratios. They have thus created what a comment in Science calls the “best record to date of the glacial to interglacial variations in stable carbon isotopes of CO₂”.

Climate change could profoundly influence the hydrosphere of mountain ecosystems. OCCR researcher Ole Rössler, in a recent publication, analyses the potential drought stress in a Swiss mountain catchment. The forecasting of high mountain soil moisture reveals a drastic decrease, despite major uncertainties. The study by Ole Rössler of the Institute of Geography at the University of Bern, which was published in the renowned journal Water Resources Research analyses the impact of the climate on soil moisture in a high mountain catchment in order to facilitate the development of mitigation and adaptation strategies.

For an overview of OCCR activities and events see www.oeschger.unibe.ch

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