

Media Information

Dübendorf, St. Gallen, Thun, 29th July 2008

Discussions regarding scientific cooperation with Columbia in the fields of e-Waste and bio-fuels

Columbian Ambassador visits Empa in St.Gallen

No trace of the diplomatic ill-feeling between Columbia and Switzerland rumoured in recent times in the press: the Columbian Ambassador to Switzerland, Claudia Jiménez, visited Empa in St. Gallen on 11th July – and appeared impressed «by the exceptional quality of the research and development activities» demonstrated to her. «With this, Empa is making a significant contribution to Switzerland's excellent worldwide reputation», commented the ambassador.

At the meeting between Empa and the Columbian delegation, which, alongside Ambassador Jiménez, included commercial attaché Jean Philippe Pening, scientific attaché Hugue Bergon, Iván González from Syngenta International and Melba Villa from the Columbian & Swiss Chamber of Commerce, the prime focus was on projects being carried out by Empa on behalf of the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) in Columbia, for example in the field of electronics waste (e-Waste) and associated recycling, as well as in the field of sustainable utilisation of forests. Ambassador Jiménez remarked that, by providing an impetus, Empa was playing an important role in the establishment of successful economic relationships with emerging markets such as Columbia, and «Switzerland can be very proud of that».

Expansion of the e-Waste partnership to Columbia and Peru

In the middle of July, SECO approved the second phase of the «e-Waste Recycling Latin America» project, which will run for three years and involve the establishment in Columbia and Peru of efficient e-Waste recycling systems adapted to local conditions. The project team will be led by Heinz Böni and Empa experts from the «Technology and Society» department. During the project, Böni and his colleagues will be able to call and build upon experience of the SECO financed «Knowledge Partnership in e-Waste Recycling» programme in China, India and South Africa. «Between 6000 and 9000 tonnes of electronic waste accumulates annually in Columbia and Peru», states Böni. These figures are forecasted to double over the next five years. «In order to correctly dispose of these hi-tech waste mountains in a resource-efficient way, local functioning e-Waste recycling systems are urgently required », adds Böni.

Biogenous fuels are also a topic of interest for Columbia

The delegation also showed considerable interest in the activities of Rainer Zah's Empa team in the field of eco-balancing with biogenous fuels, an area on which the Columbian government is pinning much hope. The first discussions about a joint local project are already underway – one which would involve the establishment of a comprehensive bio-energy platform. Empa would in this context assume the role of making various energy crops and cultivation methods comparable with each other in terms of environmental sustainability, with the aid of life cycle analyses (LCA). Areas of research interest are, for example, differences in the eco-balances between well-known bio-fuels made from soya or sugar cane and fuels developed from new cultivation methods adapted to tropical conditions, such as the undemanding and inedible oil plant *Jatropha curcas* or the tropical sugar beets cultivated by Syngenta.

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The Colombian Ambassador, Claudia Jiménez, finds out about the newest developments in the Empa Laboratories at Empa in St. Gallen, pictured here in the functional fibres area.



Xaver Edelmann, Member of the Empa Directorate, explains the Empa activities in the fields of eco-balancing and biotechnology to the Colombian Ambassador, Claudia Jiménez.

The jpg images can be downloaded [here](#).