

CERN, ESA and ESO Launch “Physics On Stage”

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Physics is everywhere. The laws of physics govern the Universe, the Sun, the Earth and even our own lives. In today's rapidly developing society, we are becoming increasingly dependent on high technology. Computers, transport, and communication are just some of the key areas that are the result of discoveries by scientists working in physics.

But how much do the citizens of Europe really know about physics? Here is a unique opportunity to learn more about this elusive subject!

Beginning in February 2000, three major European research organisations are organising a unique Europe-wide programme to raise the public awareness of physics and related sciences.

“Physics on Stage” is launched by the European Laboratory for Particle Physics (CERN), the European Space Agency (ESA) and the European Southern Observatory (ESO), with support from the European Union. Other partners are the European Physical Society (EPS) and the European Association for Astronomy Education (EAAE).

This exciting programme is part of the European Week for Science and Technology and will culminate in a Science Festival during November 6–11, 2000, on the CERN premises at the French-Swiss border near Geneva.

Why “Physics on Stage”?

The primary goal of “Physics on Stage” is to counteract the current decline in interest and knowledge about physics among Europe's citizens by means of a series of highly visible promotional activities. It will bring together leading scientists and educators, government bodies and the media, to confront the diminishing attraction of physics to young people and to develop strategies to reverse this trend.

The objective in the short term is to infuse excitement and to provide new educational materials. In the longer term, “Physics on Stage” will generate new developments by enabling experts throughout Europe to meet, exchange and innovate.

“Physics on Stage” in 22 European Countries

“Physics on Stage” has been initiated in 22 European countries¹. In each of these, a dedicated National Steering Committee is being formed which will be responsible for its own national programme.

“Physics on Stage” is based on a series of high-profile physics-related activities that will inform the European public in general and European high-school physics teachers and media representatives in particular about innovative ways to convey information about physics. It will stress the intimate connection of this natural science with our daily lives. It will be accompanied by a broad media debate on these subjects.

What will happen during “Physics on Stage”?

During the first phase of “Physics on Stage”, from now until October 2000, the individual National Steering Committees (NSCs) will survey the situation in their respective countries. The NSCs will collaborate with national media to identify new and exciting educational approaches to physics. These may involve demonstrations, interactive experiments, video and CD-Rom presentations, Web applications, virtual reality, theatre performances, etc.

Nationally run competitions will select some of the best and most convincing new ideas for presentations and educational materials which will receive development support from “Physics on Stage”.

The project will culminate in November 2000, with approxi-

mately 400 delegates converging on CERN, in Geneva, for the Physics on Stage Festival. During this event, the national competition winners, science teachers, science communicators, publishers, top scientists and high-level representatives of the ministries and European organisations will brainstorm future solutions to bolster physics' popularity. The programme will also include spectacular demonstrations of new educational tools; the best will be disseminated over the national TV networks and other media to the European public.

Why CERN, ESA and ESO?

As Europe's principal organisations in physics research (particle physics, space and astronomy), the three recognised their mutual responsibility to address the issue through the creation of a new initiative and the creative use of their own research to attract the public and teachers alike.

About the “European Science and Technology Week”

The objective of the European Science and Technology Week is to improve the public's knowledge and understanding of science and technology – including the associated benefits for society as a whole. The Week focuses on the European dimension of research, such as pan-European scientific and technological co-operation.

The rationale for holding the Week has its roots in the importance of the role of science and technology in modern societies and the need, therefore, to ensure that the public recognises its significance in our lives.

The Week is a framework for special TV programmes, exhibitions, contests, conferences, electronic networking, and other science-related activities to promote the public understanding of science and technology.

The Week was launched in 1993, on the initiative of the European Commission. Raising public awareness of science and technology is now the subject of a clearly defined action within the Human Potential Programme of the Fifth Framework Programme.



ALMA Science Advisory Committee

The Atacama Large Millimetre Array (ALMA) project has formed a new committee to provide scientific advice to the project and outreach to the wider community. The committee holds monthly teleconferences and other meetings at regular intervals. The minutes of the teleconferences and reports from the meetings are placed on the following web site.

<http://www.eso.org:8082/committees/ASAC/index.html>

A list of the committee members can also be found on this web site. Comments or questions can be addressed directly to the individual committee members or to the committee by email via the web site. In addition, we are all willing to give colloquia or other presentations on the ALMA project.

¹The 22 countries are the member countries of at least one of the participating organisations or the European Union: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom.