



scaht

Swiss Centre for Applied
Human Toxicology

SCAHT – Committed to applied human toxicology for a decade

Basel, 27 November 2019 -- **The Swiss Centre for Applied Human Toxicology ([SCAHT](#)), a centre of excellence that assesses the risks of chemical substances to human health, celebrates its 10-year anniversary this month. Since 2009 the non-profit centre, which cooperates with the Universities of Basel, Geneva and Lausanne, has been active in regulatory toxicology, research, as well as education and training.**

Toxicologists are investigating, interpreting and communicating the risk of adverse effects of chemical substances on human health, thus providing the necessary basis for protection measures. The challenges facing toxicologists are becoming increasingly complex as new chemicals and technologies are constantly being developed, more and more health aspects must be considered, and the public is increasingly interested in interactions between individual chemicals in extremely low doses.

“In the past we primarily focused on the risks of single substances, but today’s challenges are related to an increasingly complex chemical universe where we have to evaluate long-term exposures to chemical mixtures,” explains Martin Wilks, who has been the Director of the Centre from the beginning. “There are also novel toxicological problems such as nanoparticles and microplastics which require new methodologies and approaches to risk assessment. In addition, society demands moving away from animal testing to alternative test methods for targeted research into mechanisms of diseases and assessment of new health threats.”

Protecting public health

SCAHT’s regulatory toxicology experts support national and international policy makers and regulatory authorities, which are increasingly facing challenges in the area of product safety, exposure to chemicals as well as risk assessment, management and communication. Often, this involves quantifying the risks from complex exposure scenarios such as children playing in areas where soils may contain trace amounts of potentially harmful chemicals. SCAHT experts also advise on matters of public concern such as the association of aluminium in personal care products with the risk of developing breast cancer, or possible health risks from residues of pesticide combinations in food.

Studying chemicals’ impact on health

The centre also funds applied toxicology research where scientists shed light on the impact chemical substances have on our health. SCAHT’s researchers for example study the mechanisms by which pharmaceuticals, pesticides, metals or nanomaterials are absorbed by the human body. They investigate if and how they can harm our brain cells or interfere with our metabolisms, our hormones, our reproductive system and if they contribute to the development of inflammatory or degenerative diseases.

Educating future toxicologists

SCAHT has organised graduate and postgraduate master courses at the universities of Basel, Geneva and Lausanne, and professional training for experts working at cantonal laboratories. The pharmaceutical and chemical industry, regulatory authorities and laboratories need toxicology graduates with knowledge and experience in research, product development and safety assessment of chemical substances.

Significant contributions

Thanks to cross-institutional collaborations and the inclusion of novel assessment methods and approaches, the SCAHT has made significant contributions to the field of applied human toxicology over the past 10 years, as evidenced by more than 300 publications in the peer-reviewed literature, conference presentations and participation in international regulatory toxicology projects. SCAHT researchers and regulatory toxicologists are among the most active scientists internationally in the development of so-called Adverse Outcome Pathways (AOPs), which identify causal links between key events that lead from exposure to a chemical via a specific pathway to the development of a disease.

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For more information:

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About the SCAHT

The SCAHT was founded in 2009 as an independent centre of excellence following a report by the Federal Council in response to a motion by National Councillor Maya Graf. The goal was to set up an organisation that would be responsible for research, services and training in applied human toxicology, and to close part of the gap after the closure of the Institute of Toxicology in Schwerzenbach in 2001. The centre was officially registered in Geneva as a foundation in 2014 with the University of Basel hosting its administrative office with the director, its regulatory toxicology team and supporting staff. The Swiss Confederation provides financial support to the SCAHT, which the Universities of Basel, Geneva and Lausanne match with in-kind contributions. Almost two thirds of the annual budget of currently CHF 5 million are spent on funding collaborative research projects, which form part of a strategic research programme.

The SCAHT will celebrate its anniversary with its stakeholders during an event on November 27th, 2019, in Bern and during the [Annual Meeting](#) of the Swiss Society of Toxicology on November 28th and 29th in Basel.