

Obituary

Professor Dr Karl Wuhrmann†
Editorial Board 1974–1985

Dr Karl Wuhrmann, emeritus Professor for Microbiology at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich and former Head of the Biology Department of the Swiss Federal Institute for Water Resources and Water Pollution Control (EAWAG) in Dubendorf, died on 16 September 1985 at the age of 73. Only his intimate friends knew of his severe heart condition to which he so suddenly and unexpectedly succumbed.

Professor Wuhrmann was an acknowledged specialist and scientist in the field of applied microbiology and aquatic ecology. He is the author of several fundamental studies on the application of the activated sludge process in the treatment of wastewaters. His biochemically derived method for the investigation of microbiological processes contrasted markedly with other, mostly descriptive publications. He studied the effect of eutrophication on the biocenosis of flowing waters and vigorously supported the development of improved analytic methods for water quality determination. His artificial channels at Tuffenwies experimental station of EAWAG which simulated self-purifying processes in flowing waters were well-known and remained for a long time a rather isolated experimental installation.

Professor Wuhrmann attached great importance to phosphate precipitation as a supplementary wastewater treatment process. However, he also knew very well that it was not the final answer to the wastewater problem. He was concerned about the increase in abiotic chemical compounds in wastewater and their still unknown effects on ecology.

His studies on the toxic effects of ammonia and cyanide on freshwater fish were not only of great scientific interest but contributed to the revision of the Federal Law on Fisheries in 1973.

Karl Wuhrmann was a very critical specialist. Anybody who consulted him on research matters had to be well informed. This is precisely why his independent opinion was sought by many of his colleagues. His quest for answers was sustained by the idea of finding the best possible solution for humanity. He was thereby not afraid to offend his interlocuters.

His death is a great loss not only to water scientists but to all branches of environmental protection.

Peter Perret