

In remembrance of Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. mult. German Müller

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Published online: 3 April 2008
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Our colleague German Müller of Heidelberg died on December 21, 2007, at the age of 77 years. Along with his family—his wife and relatives, 11 children, 54 grandchildren and 1 great-grandchild—we mourn a colleague of national and international distinction who advanced the field of inorganic environmental geochemistry in Germany, and who has published environmentally relevant groundbreaking and pioneering investigations on inorganic nutrients and pollutants in soils, in sediments and in water.

German Müller studied mineralogy and geology in Cologne and Bonn from 1948 through 1952. He earned his PhD in 1952 in Bonn and subsequently worked for several years abroad in the oil industry. He returned to science in 1959 as assistant professor at the University of Tübingen, where he earned his professorship in 1961, and afterwards accepted a position at the University of Heidelberg. In 1972 he founded the Institute for Sediment Research, which was later renamed the “Institute for Environmental Geochemistry”. German Müller investigated recent sediments as an approach to a better interpretation of fossil sediment deposits. By describing the general conditions of bodies of waters, and considering the evidence of anthropogenic influences, he developed the environmental sciences with a focus on geoscience as a contemporary and broad area of research. German Müller developed a completely new research field with the geochemical mapping of important river systems, first in the western German states and then after 1989 also in the highly polluted rivers and

lakes of the new eastern states. With experience gained in Germany, he worked on large projects in Brazil, China, Yugoslavia and Russia. He was greatly concerned about bringing attention to the intensifying problem of water pollution by heavy metals and organic contaminants.

Even after his retirement in 1998 German Müller remained active on many projects in his working group, inorganic environmental geochemistry; for example, on a Volga-Rhein project, on the monitoring of groundwater and soil pollution in the Gaza Strip, the heavy-metal mapping of small and medium-sized streams in Baden-Württemberg, the input and retention of nutrients and pollutants from a low-mountain range watershed area to a shallow lake, and on the accumulation and alteration of mercury in tropical rivers and wetlands in Brazil.

In addition to many diploma students, German Müller advised over a hundred PhD students and ten professorial candidates. His research results are documented in over three hundred publications. Everyone who knew German Müller was impressed by his energy and tireless dedication to his science. He received many honors for his pioneering work, including the “Gustav Steinmann Award” of the German Geological Society in 1999.

Two summers ago I met German Müller after a presentation in Heidelberg and he was still brimming with new ideas. With his enthusiasm he certainly would have realised many of them if death had not taken him from our midst. We will preserve his memory with honor.