

Virtual Conference on Contaminants in Freezing Ground

At the First Conference (1997) it was decided to establish a Virtual Conference on the world wide web; this was recognised as desirable particularly because specialists and practitioners in matters of cold regions ground contamination tend to be widely dispersed. It was agreed that the initial members would be those who had registered for the First Conference, that the Virtual Conference would be password protected and that subsequent members would pay a fee of US \$75.- (which also provided a copy of the First Conference Proceedings) - initially for a period of one year. The Conference organisers undertook to establish the Virtual Conference as an 'arm's length' undertaking with there being no financial involvement on the part of the Universities. The modest income provided by the new members, was augmented by a small grant from the Canadian Polar Commission. This allowed participation by northern communities, especially indigenous peoples, through selected persons who would essentially manage 'institutional' membership. Visits to the site remained relatively few, however, partly because of the lack of activity due to limited funding, as well as the infrequency of contributions posted by members.

At the Second Conference there was further discussion of the Virtual Conference and its potential value. There was strong support for a proposal to fund the Virtual Conference by sponsor payments from companies who, in return, would receive appropriate identification on the Virtual Conference site. Participation by members at large would be free of charge and this could be expected to increase the number of site visitors. More generally it would lead to a more thorough and effective use of the Virtual Conference as a means of rapid and ongoing communication between consultants, contractors, local agencies and organisations, researchers, students and others. Unfortunately, due to circumstances largely outside the control of the Conference Secretariat and potential sponsors, this development has for the most part, not yet taken place. The use of web communications and of this kind of remote conferencing has advanced substantially over the last year or two and the number of people able to fully benefit has grown substantially along with computer and net skills generally. Consequently decisions are expected at the Hobart meeting (3rd. Conference) concerning the future operation of the Virtual Conference (web site: www.freezingground.org/vc)