

News release

A bubbling official launch for the International Year of Physics in South Africa

Tuesday, 15 March 2005

It is all bubbles go for the official lunch of the International Year of Physics in South Africa.

Science and Technology Minister Mosibudi Mangena will officially launch “It’s Your Physics” - the South African celebrations of the UN’s International Year of Physics at the SASOL SciFest in Grahamstown on Friday, 18 March 2005 at 12:00.

The Minister’s official opening will be followed by a presentation of the world-renowned physicist, Prof Gibor Basri’s talk on “Looking for Earths around other stars.”

Minister Mangena will then, with hundreds of budding physicists attending the SciFest, set “It’s your Physics” in motion by signing a weather balloon that will be launched thanks to the cooperation of the South African Weather Services. The balloon will also carry a container with contact details of the South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement (SAASTA), the implementation agency for the International Year of Physics in South Africa – should someone find the remains of the balloon.

The physics of bubbles will then come to life as learners blow bubbles from the old-fashioned bubble juice – which has all to do with physics. Ever wondered why the bubbles you are blowing are round? Or where the lovely colours come from? The round shape is because the bubble tries to be as small as possible while still holding the air trapped inside. The colours are because the thin, see-through wall of the bubble, which is about 100 times thinner than a strand of hair, causes some of the light that hits it to interfere with other light.

Science and Technology Director General, Rob Adam says activities presented during the yearlong “It’s Your Physics” campaign will aim to popularise physics and illustrate its importance in everyday life.

“For too long the perception that physics is difficult and is meant for the very clever has existed, resulting in far too few students choosing physics as a study option or a career choice.

“ We trust that the “It’s Your Physics” programme will create an environment that will stimulate budding physicists to enter this career field and help make South Africa competitive in this field,” says Adam.

“The physics community in South Africa is remarkably resilient. Despite problems, there are some areas of research at universities and institutes that are internationally competitive, while others are of a good national standard. The physics research and teaching community is talented and if augmented by enthusiastic younger people, will be able to take advantage of the new possibilities that are unfolding,” he says.

“Physics should be popularised for the public to understand, bursary schemes minimising the financial barriers for students to enter and remain in physics revised, and a national research information network to enable non-commercial research and a national research library resource created.

“Very importantly, teaching mathematics and science in primary and secondary schools should be encouraged, a demographically representative workforce developed, whilst employment opportunities in physics should be communicated clearly,” says Adam.

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