



# Obituary Notice: Martin Wahlen

Professor emeritus studied atmospheric trace gases

Dec 13, 2016

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Martin Wahlen, a professor emeritus of physics at Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UC San Diego, passed away on November 23, 2016. He was 76.

Wahlen's research career focused on the study of atmospheric trace gases, their global budgets in the present atmosphere, and their roles in past climate changes as determined from studies of air entrapped in ice cores from Greenland and Antarctica. He conducted important work on the greenhouse gases carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide. He is particularly known for his expertise in the difficult measurement of variations in the isotopic composition of these gases, despite their low abundances in air that range down to parts-per-million to parts-per-trillion levels.

His work on isotopes of carbon dioxide in the modern atmosphere, together with late Scripps geochemist Charles David Keeling, led to a better understanding of global carbon cycle budgets. His work on Antarctic ice cores focused on the relationships between changes in carbon dioxide and changes in climate spanning 500,000 years of Earth history and at least five glacial-interglacial cycles.

Wahlen was well-regarded as a mentor to graduate and undergraduate students, and he was an active participant in UC San Diego's Faculty Mentor Program. As an undergraduate student, Laurent Palmatier studied nitrous oxide levels in the troposphere with Wahlen and described him as "the exact kind of person you want as your faculty mentor. For me, he has been a mentor, not just on our research project, but on important life issues that I've had as well," Palmatier said.

"The procedures used in Martin's research were always on the forefront of the measurement possibilities requiring extensive lab work and the unique use of the NASA high altitude aircraft for measurements," said Bruce Deck, an associate development engineer at Scripps and Wahlen's colleague.

Wahlen was born in Switzerland and received his master's and PhD from the University of Bern. He served for a brief time in UC San Diego's Chemistry Department beginning in 1970 before returning to Bern as a senior research associate. After serving as an associate professor at the State University of New York at Albany, Wahlen returned to UC San Diego in 1990 to join Scripps as a professor. He retired in 2009 following 19 years of service.

He is survived by his two daughters, Regina and her husband Benjamin Welch of Greensboro, VT, and Katrin and her husband Daniel Schamberg of Voorheesville, NY. He was also a grandfather to Jacob Wahlen-Strothman and Noah and Madeline Schamberg. He is also survived by his brother, Hans Wahlen and his sister, Christina Mosher, both of Switzerland, and his cousin Jacqueline and her husband Leonard Benjamin of Linfield, PA. Wahlen is preceded in death by his son, Michaeli Wahlen.

Services and interment will be held privately at a later date.

— *Information used from M. Wahlen retirement announcement*

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