**Bringing the 3Rs to a virtual conference**

**Summary:** NC3Rs Toxicology Science Manager Dr Briony Labram shares her experience of virtually attending and presenting at SETAC SciCon.

The NC3Rs team has [continued to operate](https://nc3rs.org.uk/news/nc3rs-and-3rs-during-covid-19) through the COVID-19 pandemic, including taking part in online meetings and conferences. In this blog post, NC3Rs Toxicology Science Manager [Dr Briony Labram](https://www.nc3rs.org.uk/dr-briony-labram) shares her experience of virtually attending SETAC SciCon, including presenting our work on [applying the 3Rs in fish acute toxicity testing](https://nc3rs.org.uk/applying-3rs-fish-acute-toxicity-testing).

Earlier this year I was awarded a British Toxicology Society (BTS) travel bursary to attend the Society for Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry ([SETAC](https://www.setac.org/)) Europe 2020 meeting in Dublin, due to take place in the first week of May. The Society aims to protect and promote sustainable environmental quality by providing a forum for multidisciplinary scientists to exchange information and ideas. Annual meetings are held in Europe and the US, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this would not be possible this year. However, instead of cancelling or postponing – disappointing over 2,000 registered delegates – the first ever virtual SETAC SciCon was held. I was pleased the BTS were still able to support my attendance.

A virtual conference was a completely new experience for most of the participants, myself included, and I did not know what to expect. However, I was impressed by the virtual conference platform, which included different areas such as a networking lounge, exhibitor hall, poster hall – all as you would expect from an in-person conference. There was also an area where almost 500 pre-recorded talks and over 1000 posters were available on-demand, removing the usual problem of picking between parallel sessions!

During the conference week, live Q&A sessions were held to provide opportunities for discussion. These were recorded and made available on-demand. Participants could also submit questions and interact with the presenter of talks or posters at any time during the conference week and the month after using chat boxes, which were available for all delegates to read. This meant the live sessions could focus on in-depth discussions – we were encouraged to turn on our webcams to provide face-to-face interaction. Of the Q&A sessions which I attended, all the presenters participated with ‘live’ audiences of over 100 delegates. Special interest group meetings were also held throughout the week, as they would be at a traditional conference.

I also presented as part of the ‘*Alternative approaches to animal testing for aquatic ecotoxicity assessments and environmental risk assessments* session’ on behalf of the NC3Rs Ecotoxicology Working Group. A recording of my presentation on *Key opportunities to replace, reduce and refine fish acute toxicity* can be found on the [NC3Rs website](https://www.nc3rs.org.uk/animals-environmental-safety-testing). Fish acute toxicity tests are conducted as part of regulatory risk assessment and hazard classification packages, mainly for industrial chemicals and pesticides. They are one of the most widely conducted regulatory vertebrate ecotoxicology tests and rely on determining the LC50, theconcentration of the chemical that is lethal to 50% of the fish. As these tests use large numbers of fish and are associated with considerable suffering, there are many opportunities to apply the 3Rs. The session was very well attended with over 130 delegates joining the live discussion.

The NC3Rs also helped organise a session on *‘Increasing the utility of non-standard studies in weight of evidence evaluations’*. This session aimed to explore the benefits and hurdles associated with the use of non-standard data sources and regulating through weight of evidence. Presentations were given by a regulatory scientist from the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA), academics and an ecotoxicologist working in the pharmaceutical industry, all bringing different perspectives to the topic. This provoked some very fruitful discussions in the Q&A session.

I really enjoyed my virtual SETAC SciCon experience. Despite some initial uncertainty, I was impressed with the level of engagement, reflected by the number of people participating in the live sessions. It was great that presenters were still able to share their work, and that important and insightful discussions could be held in this new format. The only thing I missed was networking with my fellow delegates – while there were virtual opportunities, I do feel this is one aspect where in-person conferences win out! I hope the community can be reunited for SETAC 2021, but in the meantime NC3Rs staff members will continue to take advantage of online meetings.