

Polymer Week

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Abstract – Polymer Week is an annual event held at the Institute of Macromolecules, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (IMA/UFRJ). It is designed to show the community developments in the area of polymers and their presence in everyday life. At each event, there are demonstrations about the origin, synthesis, mixture, preparation, transformation and use of polymer materials and their raw materials. In addition, there is discussion of important aspects such as the applicability of polymer materials, the variety of available materials, the impacts on the environment, and recycling. Finally, the purpose of this event is to publicize, inform and raise the awareness of more and more people concerning questions that are usually of interest only to those that are directly engaged in the sciences.

Polymer Week is an extra-curricular event for high school students from the federal, state, and city school systems, including students from technical schools and private schools and undergraduates from state and federal universities. The aim of the event is to show the community the developments in the area of polymers and their presence in daily life. It is hoped that the annual events will serve to strengthen the interaction between school and university and to show young people the importance of research in different sectors within the universities, as the objective of this research is the improvement of everyday life in the community. Two events have already been organized. The 1st Polymer Week, which dealt with polymers and everyday life, was held on November 27-29, 2007. At that event, there were various activities: a documentary, poster exhibits, and theme exhibits, all of which were planned and presented by students in the Undergraduate Research program, graduate students, and researchers and staff from the Institute. The themes were the synthesis of polymers, selective collection and recycling, paints, adhesives, polymers in automobiles, and polymers in food, among others. Each theme was presented at tables set up in the Institute, and each table was called a work station. Figure 1 shows a photo taken at one of the work stations. 300 students and teachers from technical schools and federal and state universities attended that first event.

During the 2nd Polymer Week, held on October 7-9, 2008, around 500 students attended from technical schools, universities, and also public high schools. The activities at that event were designed around the main theme of rubber. Besides the work stations, mini-courses were given by doctoral students from the Institute (Figure 2).

The success of these first two events is already noticeable. Greater numbers of students attended the event, and there has been greater interest in training programs and undergraduate initiation to research related to the themes from the event.

Finally, the objectives of this initiative are to publicize and inform and also to make more and more people aware of questions that usually are the domain of those that are directly involved in the sciences. In the long run, activities of this kind may lead to a greater demand and lower drop-out of young people from universities, in addition to greater activity in science and technology.



Figure 1: Work station presented in the 1st Polymer Week



Figure 2: Mini-course on Rubber, given by a Doctoral student from IMA/UFRJ

Acknowledgements: Decania CT/UFRJ; PR3/UFRJ; Banco do Brasil