

GeoAfrica 2009 Report

The first African Regional Conference on Geosynthetics, GeoAfrica 2009, was held at the Cape Sun Hotel in Cape Town from 2 to 5 September 2009, and was organized by GIGSA, the South African Chapter of IGS. After months of planning for such an event, it is difficult to know how to report on GeoAfrica 2009. The most important point is that the conference was undoubtedly a technical, social and financial success, much to the relief of the organizers. It was also a great opportunity to catch up with old friends and industry legends, as well as to meet a new generation of up-and-coming professionals in the geosynthetics industry.

The conference covered four broad themes in geosynthetics applications: barriers, erosion protection and separation, soil reinforcement, and filtration and drainage. There were three excellent keynote addresses by Kerry Rowe, Kelvin Legge and Jorge Zornberg; three highly informative special lectures by Sam Allen, Richard Bathurst, and Malek Bouazza; and 65 technical papers were presented, which were generally of a high standard. The exhibition hall was lively too, with 31 stands, many taken by international vendors. In total, 177 delegates attended, with good international representation.

GeoAfrica 2009 was a world-class conference, and allowed a vast body of information to be assimilated by delegates in a matter of days. There was informed debate on currently contentious issues, such as the testing and appropriate use of GCLs. Of particular benefit were presentations of state-of-the-art practice, such as in Kerry Rowe's keynote address on the long-term performance of leachate collection systems and geomembrane liners for MSW landfills, Richard Bathurst's special lecture on recent developments in reinforced soil wall testing, analysis and design, and Sam Allen's special lecture on laboratory testing for geosynthetic durability and reinforcement design. Kelvin Legge's keynote presentation on Geosynthetics for Africa highlighted the extensive and varied use of geosynthetics on the African continent. This was supplemented by Malek Bouazza's interesting paper on case histories of geosynthetic applications in North Africa, while Jorge Zornberg's keynote explored the potential for the use of geosynthetic capillary barriers in alternative landfill capping systems.

An award for the paper considered to have made the best contribution at the conference was made to Nathalie Touze-Foltz, for her paper on the effects of premature hydration on the hydraulic performance of geosynthetic clay liners.

On day two of the conference GIGSA made six honorary life membership awards, as well as awards for development in technology, construction, and the president's award. The IGS also used the opportunity to make 20 year corporate membership awards to Tensar International UK, Tensar International Corporation USA, and The Reinforced Earth Company International.

The conference social events included a welcome function with entertaining talks by two of the 'grand old men' of geosynthetics in South Africa, Glen Lawson and Clifford Gundle. The conference dinner on the Friday evening had a Cape Malay theme, and the entertainment was memorable, particularly the dancing of Loke and his lovely wife with the Cape Malay choir. The trip to Spier wine estate was also a highlight, with many delegates interacting with cheetahs, tasting home grown South African wines, and enjoying a sumptuous meal at Moyo African restaurant. Other social activities around the conference included an anchor sponsor evening at a German brewery at the

Victoria & Alfred Waterfront, where some of the ladies enjoyed being served drinks by Clifford Gundle himself! The IGS Council members also ventured to try African cuisine at a traditional restaurant in Cape Town. I am sure that Russell Jones' introduction to a "smiley" (sheep's head) will remain with him for many years to come!

GeoAfrica 2009 would not have been a success without our sponsors Aquatan, CETCO and GSE (anchor sponsors); Golder Associates, Huitex Geosynthetics, Jones & Wagener, PD Naidoo & Associates and Geosynthetica.net (chain sponsors) and Gast, BKS, Enviro-Fill, EnviroServ, Geotextiles Africa, KV3 Engineers, SRK Consulting and Steffanutti Stocks (link sponsors). Kaytech sponsored the proceedings and provided the hall monitors, Gast sponsored the conference folders, and Nampak Recycling sponsored the refuse bins. Thank you for making GeoAfrica 2009 possible, particularly in a tough economic climate.

As with any large event of this nature, there are many people to thank. The members of the organizing committee, as well as the past and present GIGSA committees, all deserve thanks. A few deserve special mention: Peter Davies for organizing the technical aspects of the conference, from reviewing abstracts and papers, liaising with the scientific committee and paper authors and developing the proceedings, to coping with a number of last-minute paper retractions; Kelvin Legge for doing an excellent job of attracting sponsorship during tough economic times; and Mike Wittmann for managing the finances and providing a wise sounding board when tempers flared. Lesley Ferreira of Cebisa Conferences was the conference organizer, and went above and beyond the call of duty for GeoAfrica 2009. She and her team ensured the smooth-running of the conference itself, and her experience proved its worth over and over again.

I need to thank the IGS council and the executive officers in particular who encouraged and advised us throughout the planning and preparation leading up to the conference.

Lastly, I would like to thank all the international delegates who travelled great distances to participate in GeoAfrica 2009. We were honoured by your presence and we thoroughly enjoyed showing off our beautiful country and its people to you.

I look forward to seeing you all at the next GeoAfrica conference in 2013, probably in North Africa!

Peter Legg

Conference Chairman