

Laser science awareness campaign reaches over 300 000 people in 2008

The CSIR National Laser Centre's Public Understanding of Laser Science and Engineering (PULSE) awareness campaign was highly successful and effective in 2008, according to its management. Thomas Du Plooy, handling the initiative, says, "We have reached over 300 000 learners, students and educators *via* the campaign this year. I am pleased with the impact that this initiative has had towards the public's understanding of laser science and engineering."

PULSE communicates the CSIR's laser activities to the general public and also creates a broader community awareness of the economic and social benefits of science, engineering and technology (SET).



An exhibition during National Science Week

Du Plooy says, "When we visit schools, we give practical presentations on how lasers work and its applications in our daily lives. The experiments include the use of lenses, a mini laser show and a demonstration of the transmission of sound through light. We end most of the shows with the slogan 'science is fun'. Many learners inquire about science in general, which strengthens our aim of creating a broader community awareness of the scientific, economic and social benefits of SET."

"The most wonderful part of this job is to see the children's faces when we provide demonstrations. Some of these children have never seen scientific experiments within the context of daily life," Du Plooy says. "The centre participates in SET exhibitions and undertakes regular outreach activities to a number of schools per year with a conscious effort to target previously disadvantaged schools. For example, we undertook a collaborative initiative with the Sci-Bono science centre where learners and teachers from 12 different schools from the poorest areas in Gauteng were educated on lasers in Orange Farm."

In 2008, thirteen exhibitions including, among others, at SciFest Africa, the ScieNza Science Centre at the University of Pretoria and the MTN Science Centre in Cape Town took place. "The first of this year's events was Science Unlimited held in Pretoria in March." Du Plooy says, "Six science centres in South Africa now permanently display a DVD explaining the different types of lasers and their applications. This is certainly a leap towards PULSE's main objectives."

The initiative will be strengthened in 2009 when the centre partners with the Department of Science and Technology's outreach programme.

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