



“I would like to familiarise students with the topics of environmental chemistry at an early stage.”

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Environmental chemist Kathrin Fenner was promoted by the University of Zurich to full professor ad personam of environmental chemistry. She explains what motivates her to teach.

Environmental chemist Kathrin Fenner was promoted by the University of Zurich to full professor ad personam of environmental chemistry on 1 January 2023, having already held the same position as associate professor since 2017. At Eawag, Fenner has headed the “Environmental Fate Modelling” research group since 2010. In her research, she focuses on the environmental behaviour of chemicals, in particular their degradation by microbial communities, for example in waste water treatments plants, in surface waters and in soils.

Fenner already studied chemistry at the University of Zurich and completed her doctorate at the ETH Zurich in 2001. In doing so, she decided to combine chemistry with environmental sciences, which was not very common in the chemical sciences in Switzerland. For her doctoral thesis, she was awarded a medal by the ETH Zurich in 2002 and subsequently worked as a postdoctoral researcher at Eawag. In 2014, she was awarded an ERC Consolidator Grant. On behalf of the Swiss Chemical Society (SCG), she founded the “Chemistry and Environment” section in 2019, which she has headed ever since.

Two questions for Prof. Kathrin Fenner

Kathrin Fenner, what does the appointment mean to you?

Since I was an associate professor previously, it's not particularly a huge step. Nevertheless, it has a special significance for me. Not so much because of myself, but because this is the first time in the history of the Chemistry Department at the University of Zurich that there is a full professorship in Environmental Chemistry. This opens up completely new possibilities for developing new chemicals and chemical materials that are not only highly functional but also have a good environmental profile. This is a question that fascinates me, and one I hope I can pursue within the framework between Eawag and the University of Zurich, and with the new financial opportunities that the promotion has opened up for me.

What motivates you to teach?

I would like to familiarise chemists with the topics of environmental chemistry at an early stage. They should not only learn how to manufacture chemicals and what you can do with them, but also understand that these chemicals can get into the environment and potentially have effects on people and nature. Particularly exciting is the question of how the function of a chemical for society and good environmental behaviour could be considered together when developing new chemicals. For this, I have developed a new series of lectures, which I taught for the first time in the autumn semester of 2022. The series was very positively received by the students and I myself have enormously enjoyed dealing with these topics and discussing them with the students.

Related Links

Research profile of Kathrin Fenner

Research group "Environmental Fate Modelling" of Kathrin Fenner

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