

2019 International Association of Hydrogeologists
U.S. National Chapter's International Service Award

Dr. Alexander (Lex) van Geen

Dr. Alexander (Lex) van Geen of the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory (LDEO), Columbia University, has been selected to receive the 2019 International Association of Hydrogeologists U.S. National Chapter's International Service Award. The Award recognizes the efforts of hydrogeologists based in the United States who have shown an outstanding commitment to assisting the international community with groundwater-related needs.

Lex is receiving the International Service Award in recognition of his critical work and leadership in studying the arsenic crisis in south and southeast Asia. Tens of millions of people in the region are exposed to geogenic arsenic in alluvial aquifers along rivers draining the Himalayas, and long-term ingestion of arsenic in drinking water can result in a host of serious health ailments. Since 2000, Lex has guided a team of researchers in Earth sciences, engineering, public health, and social sciences seeking to understand mechanisms controlling the arsenic contamination and its health impacts, and to develop holistic, practical solutions. This work started at the village scale in Bangladesh and has extended to metropolitan Dhaka, Vietnam, Myanmar, Nepal, and India. The team's work has encompassed spatial and temporal variability of arsenic in groundwater, new sampling and analytical techniques (including field test kits and mobile phones), controls on arsenic mobility in groundwater, pollution by latrines and poorly completed wells, impacts of metal(loid) exposure on health and child development, performance of arsenic-removal systems, and promotion of well-switching and community wells. The foundational importance of Lex's research and effectiveness in applying it to improve public health is demonstrated in his impressive record of publications in a wide range of scientific, medical, economic, and public policy journals. As of January 2017, Lex had authored or co-authored more than 100 peer-reviewed journal articles pertaining to water-quality problems in developing countries, with 15 of these being cited over 200 times. Lex has also sought to increase global awareness of the arsenic crisis in southern Asia by writing pieces for and being interviewed by the New York Times, International Herald Tribune, BBC, Scientific American, The Economist, and other popular media. Finally, he has spread his passion for improving global public health by mentoring 30 graduate students at Columbia and institutions elsewhere in the USA, France, India, Pakistan, Mexico, and China, as well as numerous undergraduates and high-school students. Lex was nominated by Dr. Alan Fryar of the University of Kentucky.

The Award will be presented to Lex during the Hydrogeology Division Luncheon and Awards Ceremony at the Geological Society of America Annual Meeting in Phoenix, Arizona on Tuesday, September 24th. We hope you can join us for the presentation.

Congratulations Lex!