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Oceans in peril: Scientist's message to UVic meet

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Unless we halt the emission of carbon dioxide from the world's energy systems, we risk an oceanic catastrophe worse than the one associated with the disappearance of the dinosaurs, says chemical oceanographer Ken Caldeira.

That's the message the environmental scientist, who teaches out of the Carnegie Institution at Stanford University in California, intends to deliver today to a UVic conference on the future of the world's oceans.

Caldeira says the level of acidification caused by dumping hundreds of billions of tonnes of carbon dioxide into the oceans is so great it could cause a major disruption on par with, or worse than, the sudden dumping of sulphuric acid into the oceans 65 million years ago when an asteroid slammed into Earth.

When that happened, he said, it took 500,000 years for plankton to reappear, two million years for corals to redevelop, and 10 million years for the current level of oceanic biodiversity to re-emerge.

Unless drastic steps are taken now, Caldeira said, a similar marine disaster could occur within the next few decades.

Caldeira is one of a dozen international experts on marine science and human ecology scheduled to take part in a two-day conference that opened yesterday with an address by **Daniel Pauly**, director of the Fisheries Centre at the University of B.C.

Included among the topics for discussion are the oceans in a warming world, the proliferation of marine dead zones, petroleum exploration at sea, social conflicts during fishery crises and whether human societies are complicit in the collapse of coastal fisheries.

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