



There is Something in the Air over the Mediterranean: When looked at from a scanning electron microscope, the assortment of particles floating in the air exhibits a wide range of aesthetically pleasing forms. Researchers at the Biogeochemistry Department of the Max Planck Institute for Chemistry in Mainz are interested in these micrometer-sized airborne particles known as "aerosols". Aerosols affect climate at regional and global levels: they reduce the radiation that falls on earth from the sun by reflecting part of it back into space. They also play a part in the formation of clouds, which in turn affect radiation levels. The particles in the top two rows and those at the centre of the third row are of biological origin. The image on the left hand side of the middle row shows a silicate particle, presumed to have originated in the desert. The little balls in the fourth row are pulverised fuel ash, and the crystal shapes in the bottom row point to inorganic salts. The conglomerate on the right of the third row has not yet been identified.

PHOTOS: MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE FOR CHEMISTRY (COSMOCHEMISTRY AND BIOGEOCHEMISTRY)