

## **Up, up and away**

Over the next few months, folks in and around UVic may be surprised to sight some UFOs (unusual floating objects) in the skies above and to the southeast of campus. No cause for alarm: it's just Environment Canada (EC) launching dozens of instrumented weather balloons from their automated weather station compound, located on the Cedar Hill corner property adjacent to Mystic Vale.

Between Nov. 10 and Jan. 22, Environment Canada plans to launch up to 80 "upper air" weather balloons. Launches will be weather-dependent, and will take place during both day- and night-time, sometimes as often as every three hours. The balloons are white, about 1.5m in diameter, and carry a small instrument pack. Filled with helium, they ascend rapidly to an altitude of 20-30 km, transmitting data on temperature, pressure, relative humidity, wind speed and direction, before the balloon bursts and the instrument pack falls back to earth under a small parachute.

The data-collecting balloons are part of the [Olympic Mountains Experiment \(OLYMPEX\)](#) project, led by NASA and the University of Washington, and in partnership with Environment Canada. The goal of OLYMPEX is to measure and verify rain and snow precipitation levels around the complex terrain of the Olympic Peninsula and coastal mountains, using ground, aerial and satellite technologies. The data gathered will be used in a wide range of hydrologic, weather forecasting and climate applications, and will be available to any interested party, including numerous projects and departments at UVic.