

DEALING WITH RISK

Yesterday we learned that:

- The traditional paradigm of 3 successive conceptual, but inter-connected steps in how we deal with risk and risk analysis
 - Risk assessment
 - Risk management and
 - Risk communication
- is more complex than previously considered.
- As pointed out by Angelika Tritscher, risk communication is not only relevant after the risk assessment and risk management process has been completed, but also it is crucial at all steps of risk analysis. Already at the level of risk assessment, scientists interact with the citizens and public perception of science may influence the process.
- As discussed by several speakers yesterday, it is increasingly clear that Risk Perception plays an equally important role in the mechanics of risk management, and that our approach to risk management requires further development in a more practical sense for more effective policy making and ultimately better governance.
- Ortwin Renn has centered the real issue by pointing out that human behaviour depends on perceptions, not on facts.

RISK PERCEPTION

- Both Angelika Tritscher and Anne Sergeant presented largely similar description of how consumers and scientists look at risk;

Scientists

Probabalistic

Population average

Death=death

Consumers/Citizens

Personal consequences

Focus on specifics

Outrage/suffering

- On that basis, we can conclude that the public is looking at risk very differently from risk assessors. However, public perceptions can also be fragmented or different.
- This seems to be due to the complex inter-play of implicit or inherent cultural models we as humans use to interpret our environment and the world around us (examples of this have been raised by Anne Sergeant in relation to US/Europe differences, Northern and Mediterranean differences in Europe and differences in media interest and responses as touched on by Geoffrey Podger). Therefore, the public is perceiving risk within their own cultural models.
- Risk Perception (based on variation in cultural models) is influencing all steps of the risk analysis process and this may explain such intriguing situations as why scientists from across different parts of Europe are coming up with differing conclusions, despite following similar risk assessment approaches.
- Risk Perception plays a much larger role than perhaps previously considered in the risk assessment procedure, and indeed may explain such divergence in views.
- It was also pointed out by more than one speaker yesterday that when the risk is familiar and perceived not to be imposed, but taken on a voluntary basis (e.g. smoking, driving a car), it is more acceptable to the public.
- From what Mr Schanté said it appears that the lessons of the asbestos problem had led insurers to change their insurance policy to the extent that phenomena which are uncertain and non-quantifiable could may be not be insured in the future.
- On that basis it seemed that European Insurers have not come to a clear conclusion on how to deal with GMOs, thereby demonstrating that risk perception has crept into the boardroom of the Insurance Companies
- According to Ortwin Renn, the most difficult situations arise when
 - Health impacts are complex
 - There is little knowledge about probabilities

- Benefits are contested
- There are ambiguities not related to risks (e.g. ethical issues)
- There is a clear need to have a better grasp of risk communication in such situations.

DEALING WITH RISK PERCEPTION

- The Chair of yesterday's session, Robert Coleman, asked the question 'how do we take this issue forward?'

We got a number of answers from yesterday's presentations:

- The key starting point is an excellent record of risk management.
- Trust and confidence in risk management are key to risk acceptance
- Through good communication we increase TRUST and therefore acceptance of risk – but how do we really achieve a clear and effective communication?
 - through increased transparency and stakeholder involvement (Geoffrey Podger),
 - by explaining in clear, unambiguous terms (in context of the risk)
 - and by supplying the correct kind of information such as behavioural advice (Ortwin Renn) and
 - making people aware of the risk and supplying appropriate advice on action to be taken by them.
- But trust and confidence need to be built up over time and not just during crises (Geoffrey Podger).
- Another tool in increasing trust and confidence in the light of uncertainty is the application of the precautionary principle, but it has to be done correctly as Jean Russotto underlined.

CONCLUSION

- People behave according to perceptions not facts
- And therefore, policy making needs to address perceptions
- And after these two days, we have have a better knowledge about how perceptions works.