

Scientific Committee on Health and Environmental Risks

Expressing the Uncertainties for Risk Assessment and Risk Management: An International Perspective

1. Background

Risk assessments are typically informed by imperfect data and are subject to a number of potential sources of uncertainty. It is important that these uncertainties are characterised and described appropriately in each risk assessment in order to allow for appropriate science based policy making (risk management).. In discussions among EU scientific bodies and their overseas counterparts involved in risk assessment, the approaches to evaluating and expressing uncertainties have been identified for further collaborative work with a particular focus on transparency. Collaboration in this area would be beneficial in order to improve the quality, reliability, consistency and recognition of risk assessment across various sectors and jurisdictions. The development of a simple scheme for the expression of uncertainty (applicable to both human and environmental risk assessment) is required that is readily understood by both risk assessors and risk managers.

2. Terms of Reference.

In light of the above-considerations, the SCHER is asked to provide guidance for the Commission in relation to the characterisation and description of uncertainties in the risk assessment of chemicals.

In doing so, the Committees are requested to:

- Collect information and critically review current practices for treating and expressing uncertainty and confidence (IPPC, EFSA, etc.) based on the developed common templates;
- Identify/develop a 'best practice' scheme for the characterisation and expression of uncertainty and apply it in selected case studies in order to fine tune the selected approaches.

In elaborating their views on the subject the Committees are asked to actively collaborate with experts from the EU Agencies and Bodies involved in risk assessment and with experts from the United States and Canada. The issue of uncertainty description and characterisation is one of the themes identified as a priority in the context of the Trans Atlantic Dialogue in Risk Assessment aiming to establish and validate a common global reference framework for the characterization and expression of uncertainty.

Deadline

The work of the Scientific Committees should be at a stage where it can be presented for public scrutiny by the time of the 2nd International Risk Assessment Conference on 25-28 January 2011 in which a session devoted to uncertainty is planned.