

WTO Workshop on Risk Analysis, Geneva, 13-14 October 2014
New approaches on risk communication

Prof. Dr. Antoon Opperhuizen is Director of the Office of Risk Assessment and Research of the Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (NVWA), and Professor of Risk Assessment and Risk Communication at the Maastricht University in the Netherlands.

The NVWA mission includes Food and Product Safety, Animal Welfare, Animal Health, Plant Health and Nature. The fundamental approach of the NVWA is to understand risk as being composed of effect and the chance (probability) that this effect will be manifested. This chance – effect paradigm of risk is widely applied for risk analysis and risk management. To characterize the chance – effect paradigm, risk profiles will be used. These profiles also indicate actors who can influence the risk, so that they can be used as helpful tools for risk communication. This may lead to various risk communication strategies for different risk issues, and also to different strategies focussing on various stakeholders.

The risk profiling strategy includes also perception elements, both on the side of the experts, as well as for stakeholders and the general public. For example: pesticides are by the general population often regarded as a major risk, while expert judgement states that this is of minor importance for public health. On the other hand, marine biotoxins are not recognized by the general population as a threat, while expert judgement calls for concern. These examples illustrate that different risk communication strategies may be applied by NVWA. Whereas for pesticides, informing about reality may be the focus, and using mild risk communication strategies may be preferable, for marine toxins awareness raising might be a better alternative. Awareness raising strategies could be well supported by active use of social media, whereas for trust building communication, active use of social media might be less favourable. In the presentation an example will be given of the ‘Ambrosia campaign’.