

Risk governance strategies for nanotechnology applications in food and cosmetics - for the International Risk Governance Council / Geneva

***Brief description:***

Though public perception of nanotechnologies is still positive in general, applications in foods and cosmetics have become hot topics for many consumers and regulators and are the focus of campaigning NGO's. Qualitative consumer surveys provide evidence of a positive to indifferent attitude towards nanotechnologies and nano applications with one exception: foods. Concerns about cosmetics are also rising and requests for more risk assessments before marketing cosmetics have been raised by consumer advocacy groups and independent experts. Most regulatory agencies are considering questions of labelling especially for foods and cosmetics. However, before industry started to engage in some form of voluntary programme for risk assessment and risk communication, some regulators have indicated the urgent need for accessible information on nanotech products. In spite of the fact that both food and cosmetic applications have attracted similar attention from many NGO's, consumers and public authorities, the responses by the respective industries vary considerably. The food industry is about to start to be part of ongoing stakeholder dialogues. Most statements in food industry claim that there are no nanomaterials used in food items at the moment. Existing scientific studies suggest, however, nanomaterial applications are used in convenience food, in salt and spices. From current research, the answer to the question of whether or not nanotechnology is included in foods is entirely dependent on the definition about what counts as nano and what does not. The problem of scale is also known to the cosmetic industry yet there is less resistance to calling it nano and engage in a stakeholder dialogue.

Given this situation, the project pursues the following objectives:

- To explore the different definitions and frames that have been used in the debate on nanoscaled material in food and cosmetics
- To identify the areas of applications containing nanomaterials in present food items and cosmetics and in future products currently in the research and development pipelines
- To review the current studies and investigations with respect to risk assessment
- To review the present risk management activities and regulatory activities in different countries and continents (Europe, US, Japan, Korea, and others)
- To compare tolerability and acceptability judgements between international actors (different countries, international organisations)
- To identify gaps and options for global risk governance
- To explore the possibilities for motivating the actors to design a voluntary certification programme for mitigating possible risks, information and exchange on food items and cosmetics and being more involved in risk communication efforts

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