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Principles of Risk Communication

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Risk communication – an integral component of Risk analysis

«Risk analysis is a process consisting of three components:

- Risk assessment
- Risk management
- **Risk communication»**

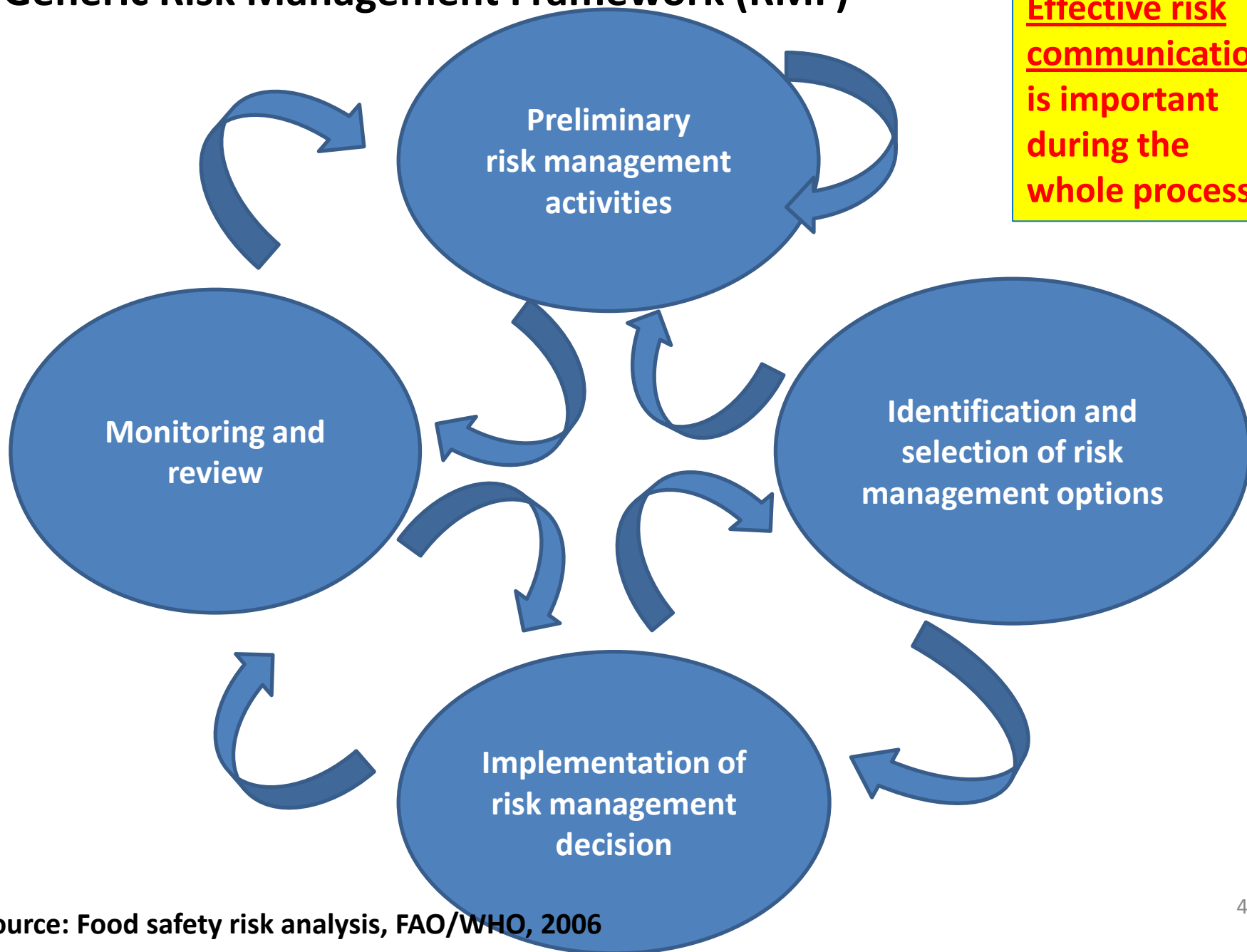
Risk communication

Codex definition

«The **interactive exchange** of information and opinions **throughout the risk analysis process** concerning risk, risk-related factors and risk perceptions, **among risk assessors, risk managers, consumers, industry, the academic community and other interested parties,** including the explanation of risk assessment findings and the basis of risk management decisions.»

Reference: Definitions of risk analysis terms related to food safety, Procedural Manual of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, 21st Edition

Generic Risk Management Framework (RMF)



Effective risk communication is important during the whole process!

Risk communication

Risk communication is an **integral part of risk analysis** and **an inseparable element of the Risk management framework** in which **risk managers, risk assessors, interested stakeholders** **exchange information and opinions** concerning risk, risk-related factors and risk perceptions.

Risk communication

Risk communication helps to provide timely, relevant and accurate information to, and to obtain information from, members of the risk analysis team and external stakeholders, in order to improve knowledge about the nature and effects of a specific food safety risk.

Risk communication

Successful risk communication is a prerequisite for effective risk management and risk assessment. It contributes to transparency of the risk analysis process and promotes broader understanding and acceptance of risk management decisions.

Risk communication

Risk communicator

Everyone involved in a risk analysis is a “risk communicator” at some point in the process. Therefore, risk assessors, risk managers and “external” participants all need risk communication skills and awareness.

Some food safety authorities have **communication specialists.**

Risk communication

Risk communication is a two-way process!



It involves sharing information whether between risk managers and risk assessors (internal risk communication) or between members of the risk analysis team and external stakeholders (external risk communication).

Risk communication

The fundamental goal of risk communication is to provide

- **timely**
- **meaningful**
- **relevant and**
- **accurate information**
- **in clear and understandable terms**
- **targeted to a specific audience.**

Risk communication

Identifying “stakeholders”

Risk managers should strive to identify potential stakeholders (primary producers, industry, retailers, consumers and consumer organisations, academia and research organisations, etc.) to be invited to participate at appropriate points of the risk management framework, based on specific criteria and their roles should be defined.

Criteria for identifying potential stakeholders to participate in a given food safety risk analysis

Source: Box 4.8, FAO/WHO, 2006

- **Who might be affected by the risk management decision (including groups that already know or believe they are affected, as well as groups that may be affected but do not know it yet)?**
- **Who has information and expertise that might be helpful?**
- **Who has been involved in similar risk situations before?**
- **Who has expressed interest in being involved in similar decisions before?**
- **Who should rightfully be involved, even if they have not asked to be involved?**

Examples of potential stakeholders in a particular food safety risk analysis

Source: Box 4.7, FAO/WHO, 2006

- **Farmers, ranchers, fishermen and other food producers**
- **Food processors, manufacturers, distributors and their vendors**
- **Food wholesalers and retailers**
- **Consumers and consumer organisations**
- **Other citizen advocacy groups (environmental, religious, etc.)**
- **Community groups (neighbourhood associations, co-operatives, etc.)**
- **Public health community and health care providers**
- **Universities and research institutions**
- **Government (local government, state and federal regulatory agencies, elected officials, importing countries etc.)**
- **Representatives of different geographic regions, cultural, economic or ethnic groups**
- **Private sector associations**
- **Businesses**
- **Labour unions**
- **Trade associations**
- **Media**

Strategies for effective communication with external stakeholders during a food safety risk analysis

- **Collect, analyse and exchange background information about the food safety risk.**
- **Determine risk assessors', risk managers' and other stakeholders' perceptions of and knowledge of the food safety risk or risks involved, and their resulting attitudes and risk-related behaviour.**
- **Learn from external stakeholders what their risk-related concerns are and what their expectations are for the risk analysis process.**
- **Identify and be sensitive to related issues that may be more important to some stakeholders than the identified risk itself.**
- **Identify the types of risk information stakeholders consider important and want to receive, and the types of information they possess and wish to convey.**
- **Identify types of information needed from external stakeholders, and determine who is likely to have information to contribute.**
- **Identify the most appropriate methods and media through which to disseminate information to, and obtain information from, different types of stakeholders.**
- **Explain the process used to assess risk, including how uncertainty is accounted for.**
- **Ensure openness, transparency and flexibility in all communication activities.**
- **Identify and use a range of tactics and methods to engage in an interactive dialogue involving risk analysis team members and stakeholders.**
- **Evaluate the quality of information received from stakeholders and assess its usefulness for the risk analysis.**

Risk communication

When planning for communication an essential step is to **determine what the goal is**. Thus those planning communication programmes need to establish:

- 1. What the subject of the communication is (e.g. risk assessment policy, understanding outputs of a risk assessment, identifying risk management options, etc.);**

Risk communication

When planning for communication (contd)

2. Who needs to participate (generically: risk assessors, the affected industry or specifically: which individuals);

3. When each kind of communication should take place during the risk analysis process.

Risk communication

Elements of effective risk communication

The nature of the risk

- The characteristics and importance of the hazard of concern;
- The magnitude and severity of the risk;
- The urgency of the situation;
- Trends (is the risk increasing or decreasing?)
- The probability of exposure to the hazard;
- The distribution of exposure;
- The amount of exposure that constitutes a significant risk;
- The nature and size of the population at risk;
- Who is at the greatest risk?

Risk communication

Elements of effective risk communication

The nature of the benefits

- The actual or expected benefits associated with each risk;
- Who benefits and in what ways;
- Where the balance point is between risks and benefits;
- The magnitude and importance of the benefits;
- The total benefit to all affected populations combined.

Risk communication

Elements of effective risk communication

Uncertainties in risk assessment

- The methods used to assess the risk;
- The importance of each of the uncertainties;
- The weakness of, or inaccuracies in, the available data;
- The assumptions on which estimates are based;
- The sensitivity of the estimates to changes in assumptions;
- The effect of the changes in the estimates on risk management decisions.

Risk communication

Elements of effective risk communication

Risk management options

- The action(s) taken to control or manage the risk;
- The action individuals may take to reduce personal risk;
- The justification for choosing a specific risk management option;
- The effectiveness of a specific option;
- The benefits of a specific option;
- The cost of managing the risk, and who pays for it;
- The risks that remain after a risk management option is implemented.

Risk communication

Risk communication should

- i) Promote awareness and understanding of the specific issues under consideration during the risk analysis;
- ii) Promote consistency and transparency in formulating risk management options/recommendations;
- iii) Provide a sound basis for understanding the risk management decisions proposed;
- iv) Improve the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the risk analysis;

Risk communication

Risk communication should (contd)

- v) Strengthen the working relationships among participants;
- vi) Forster public understanding of the process, so as to enhance trust and confidence in the safety of the food supply;
- vii) Promote the appropriate involvement of all interested parties;
- viii) Exchange information in relation to the concerns of interested parties about the risks associated with food;
- ix) Respect the legitimate concern to preserve confidentiality where applicable. *(Specific to the Working Principles for Risk Analysis for Food Safety for Application by Governments CAC/GL 62-2007)*

Risk Communication: Eight Principles

Eight principles of risk communication

- 1. Know the audience**
- 2. Involve the scientific experts**
- 3. Establish expertise in communication**
- 4. Be a credible source of information**
- 5. Share responsibility**
- 6. Differentiate between science and value judgement**
- 7. Assure transparency**
- 8. Put the risk in perspective**

Risk communication

Mechanisms for communicating with stakeholders:

- meeting techniques
- and
- non-meeting techniques.

Some tactics for engaging stakeholders in a food safety risk analysis

Box 4.9, FAO/WHO, 2006

Meeting techniques

- Public hearings
- Public meetings
- Briefings
- Question and answer sessions
- Town hall meetings
- Panel discussions
- Focus groups
- Workshops
- Etc.

Non-meeting techniques

- Interviews
- Hotlines and toll-free numbers
- Web sites
- Advertising and flyers
- Television and radio
- Reports, brochures and newsletters
- Booths, exhibits and displays
- Contests and events

Risk communication

Some pitfalls to avoid - Risk communication is not ...

- Risk communication is not public education;
- Risk communication is not public relations;
- Telling people that a food is safe will not necessarily reassure them.

Risk communication

Successful risk communication is a prerequisite for effective risk management and risk assessment.

It contributes to

- **Transparency** of the risk analysis process
and
- **It promotes a better understanding and acceptance** of the risk management decisions.

Thank you for your attention!