



**United Kingdom
Interdepartmental Liaison Group
on Risk Assessment
(UK-ILGRA)**

**Third Report prepared by the
Interdepartmental Liaison Group on Risk
Assessment**

ILGRA 2002

CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	1
Outcomes of initiatives undertaken	1
• <i>Departmental frameworks for decision-making</i>	1
• <i>Clarifying the role of experts</i>	1
• <i>Policy on the precautionary principle</i>	2
• <i>Improving risk communication</i>	2
• <i>Health risks from chemicals</i>	3
• <i>Commissioning collaborative research</i>	4
An agenda for future work	4

THIRD REPORT PREPARED BY THE INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON GROUP ON RISK ASSESSMENT

Introduction

1. This is the third report to Ministers by the Interdepartmental Liaison Group on Risk Assessment (ILGRA). The report sets out:
 - i. the activities and achievements of ILGRA since it last reported to Ministers in 1998¹; and
 - ii. an agenda for future work.
2. This report will be the last as ILGRA is to be replaced under the new structure recommended in the Cabinet Office Strategy Unit (SU) Report, *“Risk - Improving government’s capability to handle risk and uncertainty”*, and will form an important source document for taking forward the pan-government agenda on risk management under the proposed new arrangements.
3. Risk issues have continued to rise on the public agenda, and it is accepted that success in managing risk, whether to national security, the economy, people or the environment, is an important element in how the public judge the competence of Government. ILGRA has continued to help Departments by providing materials and frameworks for effective and more inclusive risk framing and decision making.

Outcomes of initiatives undertaken

Encouraging Departments to describe and publish their frameworks for decision-making

4. In its second report to Ministers ILGRA recommended that Departments should prepare and publish framework documents explaining procedures, protocols and criteria they apply in making risk-based decisions. Departments have now done this and a recent Cabinet Office review has shown clearly that the idea and usefulness of Risk Frameworks are increasingly permeating Departments. In many cases, they have become an integral part of Departments’ risk work, becoming embedded in their policy work and culture. In many Departments the Frameworks have either been reviewed, or there are plans to do so, while almost a quarter have been revised and updated.

Clarifying the role of experts in the decision-making process

5. Responding to the Phillips Report on BSE and working with the Office of Science and Technology, ILGRA arranged for research to be commissioned jointly by eight Departments to identify and disseminate

¹ *Risk Assessment and Risk Management: Improving Policy and Practice within Government Departments*, second ILGRA report to Ministers, HSE (1998), <http://www.hse.gov.uk/dst/ilgra/minrpt2.htm>

general principles to underpin the process of securing and using scientific advice². The findings contributed to:

- revision and reissue of guidelines by the Government's Chief Scientific Adviser on scientific advice and policy making³;
- preparation of a code of practice setting out procedural guidelines that scientific advisory committees should follow⁴.

Developing a consistent policy on the precautionary principle

6. A paper⁵ setting out a common approach to the precautionary principle has, with Ministers' agreement, been published on the ILGRA website as a firm basis for further debate and development.

7. ILGRA's work took into account:

- the emphasis in the Phillips report on the importance of applying and enforcing precautionary measures where a hazard or threat is not well understood and the risk unproven;
- publication of a communication on the precautionary principle from the European Commission⁶;
- endorsement at the European Council at Nice in December 2000 of a Council Resolution⁷.

Improving risk communication

8. ILGRA established a risk communication sub-group in 1998 in recognition of the importance of risk communication. Its outputs have included:

- leadership to Departments in benchmarking their risk communication practice against standards in ILGRA guidance⁸;

² *Policy risk and science: securing and using scientific advice*, HSE Contract Research Report 2001/295, http://www.hse.gov.uk/research/crr_pdf/2000/crr00295.pdf

³ *Guidelines 2000: Scientific advice and policy making*, DTI (July 2000), <http://www.dti.gov.uk/ost/aboutost/guidelines.htm>

⁴ Code of practice for scientific advisory committees, DTI/OST (December 2001), <http://www.dti.gov.uk/ost/ostbusiness/committees/code.pdf>

⁵ *The Precautionary Principle: Policy and Application*, ILGRA (2002), <http://www.hse.gov.uk/dst/ilgra/pppa.htm>

⁶ *Communication on the precautionary principle*, COM(2000)1 (February 2000), http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/health_consumer/library/pub/pub07_en.pdf

⁷ Presidency Conclusions, Nice European Council Meeting 7, 8 and 9 December 2000, http://europa.eu.int/council/off/conclu/dec2000/dec2000_en.htm

⁸ *Risk communication – a guide to regulatory practice*, ILGRA (1998), <http://www.hse.gov.uk/dst/risk.pdf>

- research, sponsored by seven Departments and a research body, to improve Departments' understanding of the factors that affect public perception of risk. The findings⁹ will inform decisions on risk communication by Departments;
- practical tools that Departments can use to help determine which methods of stakeholder engagement are most likely to succeed in different policy contexts.

Promoting the development and adoption of more consistent approaches to risks from chemicals in food, in the environment, and at work

9. A sub-group of ILGRA, the Interdepartmental Group on Health Risks from Chemicals (IGHRC), aims to reduce the uncertainties and limitations in the process of assessing risks to people's health from chemicals, and to stimulate the development of new, improved approaches to chemical risk assessment. Its main achievements have been:

- work to provide guidance to Departments, Agencies and their advisory committees on how to improve transparency, coherence and consistency in addressing toxicological uncertainty to explain apparent inconsistencies in approach;
- identification and dissemination of best practice, for example through a workshop on "Presenting and publishing understandable and transparent risk assessments from chemical exposures";
- increased collaboration with stakeholders and partners, both nationally and internationally;
- a new Risk Assessment Research Database (RAMRED) to provide an overview of current research in this area across Government¹⁰, and identify key gaps and deficiencies in techniques and procedures.

10. A joint project, funded by the Treasury's Invest to Save Budget, involving the Health and Safety Executive and the Environment Agency is developing an interactive, internet-based system for business users that brings together advice on how to control health, safety and environmental risks from chemicals in the workplace. This is being taken forward by a project team with representatives from relevant Departments and Agencies and will involve a wide range of stakeholders.

⁹ *Social amplification of risk: the media and the public*, HSE Contract Research Report 329/2001, ISBN 0 7176 1983 4, http://www.hse.gov.uk/research/crr_pdf/2001/crr01329.pdf

The impact of social amplification of risk on risk communication, HSE Contract Research Report 332/2001, ISBN 0 7176 1999 0, http://www.hse.gov.uk/research/crr_pdf/2001/crr01332.pdf

Quantifying risk amplification processes: a multi-level approach, HSE Contract Research Report 367/2001, ISBN 0 7176 2098 0, http://www.hse.gov.uk/research/crr_pdf/2002/crr02367.pdf

¹⁰ RAMRED can be accessed at <http://wads.cfs.le.ac.uk/ieh/ramred/index.htm>

Commissioning collaborative research

11. Three major inter-Departmental research projects have been undertaken recently:

- securing and using expert advice (para. 5);
- social amplification of risk in relation to risk communication (para. 8); and
- valuation of benefits that would result from improvements in standards that protect people's health and safety. This research¹¹ found that: in general individuals are prepared to trade-off money and risk, recognising that increased levels of safety cost money that has to be taken from finite resources; no changes were needed to the longstanding value of preventing a fatality (VPF) used for road safety; and there were no marked differences in relativities between VPFs across the hazards of roads, fires in public places, domestic fires and railways. This is an area which continues to need to be explored and developed.

An agenda for future work

12. The members of ILGRA have made a critical contribution to the development of SU thinking as reflected in their Report. There is strong recognition of the value of the network and the competence built up and shared between individuals over the lifetime of ILGRA. The SU proposals are designed to exploit and develop this under the new structures and working arrangements. It is in the spirit of this evolutionary approach that SU asked ILGRA to suggest an agenda for future work. The suggestions offered included:

- the optimum solution to a risk as framed by one Department may not be optimal when viewed across Government as a whole. Work is needed to review mechanisms to anticipate and address risks that span more than one Department;
- most Departmental targets are expressed in terms of impact on the risk of actual harm to people or the environment (eg reductions in mortality from disease). These targets do not necessarily reflect the work done by Departments to address all the hazards which concern people (eg high-consequence/low probability events such as accidents at nuclear power stations), but concentration on them may unbalance Departmental objectives and programmes. It is necessary to take forward work on broadening targets to give a more balanced picture of performance across all areas of responsibility, to ensure that limited

¹¹ *Valuation of the benefits of health and safety control*, HSE Contract Research Report 273/2000, <http://www.hse.gov.uk/research/content/misc/evaluate.pdf>

resources to address risks are deployed in ways that reflect society's views and values;

- to avoid having to make separate risk assessments for each individual exposed, risk assessment is undertaken by creating a 'hypothetical person' who is assumed to have a certain relationship with the hazard. In practice, a range of hypothetical persons may be used to cover different patterns of exposure to a hazard. There are, therefore, issues of consistency (but not uniformity) in defining hypothetical persons which need to be tackled;
- although research (see para 11) has indicated that individual willingness to pay for reductions in fatalities do not vary significantly across different areas of risk, there are indications that the cost of risk management measures that resonate with society's values may sometimes be well in excess of the net value of the fatalities likely to be prevented (eg measures to improve rail safety to avoid a catastrophic incident should reflect the wider effects on society should the risk be realised). The distinction between the value of preventing a fatality (VPF) and the cost of preventing a fatality (CPF) needs to be explored to ascertain whether it should be used widely in making decisions about risk control measures;
- recent experience questions assumptions about what motivates duty holders to comply with legal requirements to manage risk. Research is needed to test and characterise more fully the factors that promote compliance, examine how compliance is managed within organisations, and identify additional levers that could be used to secure compliance;
- to improve risk communication across Government, a central resource is necessary to assemble registers of risk communication research and training programmes, and promote joint research to identify good risk communication practice and encourage its adoption by Departments.

ILGRA 2002