Risk Communication
Risk Perception and Human Behavior

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Free Trade has to be Safe Trade

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Evidence Based Policy?

Analytical capability
Parts per Billion

Carcinogen in Baby Food

Political response in proportion to media interest rather than risk

1990—"There is no risk to public health from British beef!"

TRUST?

Mr John Gummer UK Minister of Agriculture and his daughter
Why do people worry about certain risks and ignore others?

How people process and internalise risk:

- Involuntary
- Catastrophic outcome—Dread factor
- Disproportionate affect on children
- Inevitably fatal consequences
- Scientific uncertainty
- Government mis-management

Slovic 1989

The Sequel:- BSE in sheep

BSE Was the Switch
Belgian Dioxin Crisis 1999

1st They Lost £1.5 Billion – Food Ind. “Freefall”
2nd They Lost Two Ministers
3rd They Lost a Government
4th US banned certain food lines from entire EU

Food Safety Authority withdraws Belgian chocolates

EU Purchase for Destruction Scheme
Jan – June 2001

- 278,000 animals
- 90,500 tonnes carcase beef
- >400 Million Euros

Risk communication on its own - not enough

Turkeys can be contaminated with Salmonella and Campylobacter

“Don’t tell me about risks tell me that you have eliminated them

I Wonder will I get Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease from this stuff?

What a Mouthful!”
The public appear risk adverse to some risks and indifferent to other risks that they are exposed to every day. I’d never eat GMOs.

Beef – Far too risky!!!

Risk communication

- Crisis communication V “Peace Time” communication
- Communication to citizens to enable them better manage their individual risk
- Communication to politicians and policy makers to enable them better manage societal risk

Risk Communication in EU?

27 member states with different:
- Attitudes to Food
- Attitudes to Food Safety
- Attitudes to Risk
- Attitudes to Regulations
- Attitudes to Compliance
- Attitudes to Awareness Campaigns

What is the relationship between risk perception and behaviour?
- If you change peoples’ risk perception do you change their behaviour?
- Do people have insufficient information to make optimal decisions?
Risk behavior different in different domains

- Binge drinking

Knowledge no guarantee for less risk taking

- Social lubricant
- Culture
- Peer pressure
- Others behaviour-cue for Acceptability
- Unrealistic optimism

Change Behaviour

Evaluation

Necessary But not sufficient

Change Attitudes

Raise level of knowledge

Increase Awareness

Risk and Research Funding? Scientists

- Evaluation of risk communication strategies?
- Meaningful risk perception metrics?
- Why certain risks in society are neglected and others given extreme attention?
- Risk communication/ PR/spin/2 way?
- Risk managers response crucial!

We might succeed with the younger generation

Engaging the public

Internet panels

http://geary.ucd.ie/behaviour

Listen…