

The Federal Institute of Risk Assessment at a glance - dates, facts and background

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Do nanoparticles encourage the development of allergies? Does apple juice contain harmful aluminium? Can MRSA be transmitted to humans from livestock? The Federal Institute for Risk Assessment - in short BfR - is responsible for questions to do with the health assessment of food, consumer articles and chemicals. In its work it makes an important contribution to rendering food, products and chemical use safer in Germany.

BfR was established on 1 November 2002 to strengthen consumer health protection whose credibility had suffered as a consequence of the BSE crisis. This explains why the legislator wrote into the Act establishing BfR that it enjoys independence in its scientific assessments. The main task of BfR is to voice an opinion on the potential risks from food, consumer articles and chemicals, and to offer scientific advice to the federal ministries for their policy decisions. Given the Institute's remit, the main ministries involved are:

- The Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection (BMELV) (food and product safety)
- The Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU) (chemicals safety and contaminants in food)
- The Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Affairs (BMVBS) (transport of dangerous goods, ballast water agreement)

In our globalised world it is important for the institutions involved in consumer health protection to be part of an international network. BfR cooperates with a number of national and international, governmental and non-governmental agencies (FAO, WHO, OECD, etc.). It is the national Focal Point of the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA) and a partner of the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA).

Goals of BfR

BfR sees itself as the advocate of consumer health protection in a context in which many stakeholders make their voices heard. Based on its risk assessments, it seeks to strengthen consumer health protection. To this end, the Institute offers policy advice, participates in national and international agencies and disseminates consumer information. One important component in its risk assessment activities is risk communication and the various forms it can take. BfR wishes to build on these by means of various projects and events.

BfR assessment of health risks

The focus of its health assessments is on people as consumers.

Whenever control authorities detect microbial contamination or high levels of harmful toxicological ingredients, heavy metals or pesticides in foods, consumer products or cosmetics,

BfR's scientific assessment expertise is in demand. In their health assessments the Institute's scientists assume the important task of establishing how germs or substances reach a food or product, whether they constitute a risk to humans and what action should then be taken. They adopt a science-based research approach and draw on exposure assessment and toxicological methods.

The three main areas of BfR's work - food safety, product safety and chemicals safety - encompass a wide range of topics. BfR is the Institute to contact on

- Questions about the biological safety of foods and zoonoses (these are pathogens like *Salmonella* which can cross from animals to humans), research on them, their routes of transmission and spread
- Questions about microbial toxins, for instance in mussels or the antibiotic resistances of germs
- Questions about hygiene in the food sector
- Questions about food ingredients like, for instance, coumarin in cinnamon or the formation of benzene in carrot juice (food toxicology)
- Questions about nutrition risks for instance from food supplements, allergies and novel foods like noni juice
- Questions about genetically modified foods
- Questions about the contamination of foods with environmental toxins like dioxins, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) or polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs)
- Questions about feed safety
- Questions about pesticides and biocides
- Questions about intoxications
- Questions about the safe transport of toxic substances
- Questions about nanotechnology in food, consumer products and cosmetics
- Questions about the safety of cosmetics, textiles, toys, water pipes, food packaging and other consumer products
- Questions about alternative methods to animal experiments

External advice for BfR through expert panels

Since their establishment in 2008, 14 national expert panels on food safety and consumer protection have advised the Institute. At least ten independent external experts have been appointed to each BfR Committee who input their expertise into the Institute's work on a voluntary basis. This expert network gives BfR access to expertise on the highest scientific level for its risk assessments. This raises the scientific standard of its expert opinions and guarantees external quality assurance. Furthermore, the Institute is also in a position to seek external advice at very short notice in the event of crisis. In the wake of the new appointment of the Committees, a newly set up BfR Committee for Risk Research and Risk Perception will start its activities in 2011.

Furthermore, the National Breastfeeding Committee and the Committee of the Centre for Documentation and Evaluation of Alternatives to Animal Experiments (ZEBET) work within the remit of BfR.

BfR risk communication

BfR informs the general public about potential, identified and assessed risks. Here the Institute believes it is imperative to ensure that the assessment process and the foundations for assessment are as transparent and comprehensible as possible. The BfR opinions are intended for all social stakeholders who play a relevant role in consumer health protection: federal and regional ministries, public authorities on the municipal, regional and federal level, consumer associations and other interested bodies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), scientific institutions, national and international bodies and organisations, the business community, professional bodies and the media. Besides the media, consumer advice centres, *Stiftung Warentest* (test institution for consumer goods) and the *Infodienst Verbraucherschutz, Ernährung, Landwirtschaft* (information service on consumer protection, food and agriculture (aid)) are important multipliers when it comes to informing the public at large.

BfR risk communication is an ongoing, interactive process. A conscious effort is made to involve the various stakeholders in order to sound out the different interests and levels of knowledge more easily. To this end, BfR regularly stages expert meetings, scientific symposia, stakeholder fora, hearings or consumer fora. The active dialogue with target groups is, therefore, an integral part of the BfR strategy to strengthen consumer health protection.

Three BfR locations in Berlin

BfR is based in Berlin where it has three locations. Its main location is in Berlin-Jungfernheide; the President's office and another modern institute building are situated in the Berlin district of Marienfelde. There are long-term plans to consolidate the locations at this site in Marienfelde.

The large institute building in Marienfelde is equipped with state-of-the-art analytical and microbiological laboratories. The Institute also has its own unit for breeding experimental animals, isolation sheds for experimental animals, facilities for the keeping and slaughter of animals and food technology. Furthermore, it boasts meeting rooms with state-of-the-art communication technology and an auditorium with more than 400 seats in which numerous hearings, meetings, symposia and congresses are staged every year.

Research within BfR

BfR has the statutory remit to carry out research that is closely linked to its main areas of work and activities and which is necessary for the pursuit of its statutory tasks. In this way, the Institute secures and promotes scientific expertise for the purposes of internationally recognised risk assessments that are not influenced by economic interests. The research is financed solely from public funds and funding from the European Commission. The Institute does not seek private third-party funding to ensure it retains its economic, political and social neutrality.

BfR attaches great importance to national and international networking. Besides its cooperation with international organisations, BfR also cooperates on research activities with universi-

ties and scientific organisations through national and international research networks, the staging of joint EU research projects and the exchange of scientific expertise.

With a view to strengthening food safety in the new accession states, BfR plays an active role in twinning projects. In this way it contributes to improving food safety in Europe.

EFSA Focal Point

In its capacity as the national Focal Point, BfR coordinates the exchange of scientific information between the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), the authorities responsible for food and feed safety in Germany and stakeholders from the business community, political circles, the sciences and consumer associations. BfR was proposed for this task by the Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection (BMELV). National Focal Points have been set up in all 27 Member States of the European Union (EU). They are the interface between the individual Member States and EFSA. In this way, risk assessment activities in the individual Member States are to be coordinated on the European level. The goal is to pool European expertise on the health risks associated with foods and to place food safety in Europe on the highest possible scientific level.

More than 8 years BfR - A stocktaking

Thanks to the high standard of its work, its scientific independence and its transparent assessments, the Institute has become a recognised player and important driver of consumer health protection on the national and international stage. Consumers know they can trust its judgements.

BfR Telegram

Foundation

1 November 2002 as a body under public law within the portfolio of the Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection (BMELV). BfR has been certified in accordance with ISO 9001 since 2010.

Location

3 locations in Berlin

Main location: Thielallee 88-92 (Berlin-Dahlem)
 President's office: Alt-Marienfelde 17-21
 Additional Institute building: Diedersdorfer Weg 1

Human resources

Headcount:	750
Scientists:	298
Trainees:	35

Budget

For its statutory tasks, BfR was allocated funds in 2010 amounting to	€61.6 million
including third-party funding secured by it	€2.68 million

Objective

To strengthen consumer health protection in Germany and on the international level.

Main areas of work

The main areas of work laid down in the "Act restructuring consumer health protection and food safety" of 14 August 2002 encompass the

- health assessment of biological and material-chemical safety of food,
- health assessment of the safety of substances (chemicals, pesticides, biocides) and selected products (consumer articles, cosmetics, tobacco products, textiles and food packaging),
- risk assessment of genetically modified organisms in food, feed, plants and animals,
- risk communication and
- the development and validation of alternative methods to animal experiments.

Risk assessments

In 2010 BfR issued approximately 2,350 scientific opinions.

Research

Involvement in more than 54 EU projects and 33 projects of the German Research Society (DFG) and other federal agencies

Panel work

119 BfR scientists serve on 325 national and international panels.

The following are attached to BfR:

National Reference Laboratories (NRL)

17 NRLs from the fields of food safety, genetically modified organisms, food hygiene, zoonotic agents and antibiotics resistance monitoring and the Senior Expert Office for Wine.

Federal Bureau for Good Laboratory Practices (GLP)

Responsible for the national and international coordination and harmonisation of GLP-relevant questions and for the monitoring of GLP test institutes inside and outside Germany

ZEBET - Centre for Documentation and Evaluation of Alternatives to Animal Experiments

ZEBET strives, whenever possible, to replace statutory animal experiments with alternative methods. It is supported by the ZEBET Committee for the Evaluation of Alternatives to Animal Experiments.

BfR Committees

14 Committees advise the Institute. In Germany they draw together the available expertise and then input it into international panels. This guarantees rapid access to an expert network not just during a crisis.

National Breastfeeding Committee

Its task is to promote breastfeeding in Germany.

EFSA Focal Point

Its task is to coordinate the exchange of scientific information between the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), the public institutions responsible for food and feed safety in Germany and stakeholders from the business community, science and consumer associations.