Partnership for the Assessment of Risks from Chemicals

German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment

FAQ

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PARC: Identifying risks faster together

Questions and answers about the EU research partnership PARC

"PARC" stands for the "European Partnership for the Assessment of Risks from Chemicals", which was founded in 2022. This research partnership aims to help more quickly identify and minimise risks to humans and the environment posed by chemicals. To this end, one main focus is on improving and expanding the networking of the participating institutions. Various European institutions and over 200 institutions from 28 German federal states are participating in PARC.

The German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) has important steering and coordination functions within the PARC partnership. As a signatory to the grant agreement, the BfR is represented on the PARC administrative bodies. Among other things, these bodies decide on joint activities and research projects. This FAQ answers important questions about the partnership and the role of the BfR.

What is PARC?

The abbreviation "PARC" stands for "European Partnership for the Assessment of Risks from Chemicals". PARC is an EU partnership for research into the health risks posed by chemicals. In total, various European institutions and over 200 institutions from 28 countries participate in PARC.

The partnership aims to help more quickly identify and minimise risks to humans and the environment posed by chemicals. To this end, one main focus is on improving and expanding the networking of the participating institutions.

Together, these institutions can conduct more rapid and efficient assessments of the health effects of chemicals in food, consumer products and the environment. As part of the partnership, joint research projects are systematically investigating the effects of certain groups of chemicals, for example. New methods are also being developed to conduct more accurate and straightforward health risk assessments.

The results of scientific research should also be incorporated into political decisions more quickly. That is why PARC involves not only research institutions, but also political decision-makers and authorities that can then take the next step of deciding, for example, to ban certain substances or introduce limit values for their use.

Who is part of the PARC network?

A total of over 200 research institutions and authorities from 28 countries participate in PARC. Three EU authorities are also involved: the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA), the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

The contractual partners in Germany are the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) and the Federal Environment Agency (UBA). Within the framework of PARC, they coordinate a "work package" and supervise their own research projects. In addition, as the national "hub", they coordinate the work of the other German partner institutions:

- Federal Institute of Hydrology (BfG)
- University Hospital of Munich (KUM)
- Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research (UFZ)
- University of Duisburg-Essen (UDE)
- University of Osnabrück
- Fraunhofer Institute for Biomedical Engineering (IBMT)
- Fraunhofer Institute for Molecular Biology and Applied Ecology (IME)
- University of Cologne (UoC)
- Fraunhofer Institute for Toxicology and Experimental Medicine (ITEM)
- RPTU Kaiserslautern-Landau (RPTU)
- Leibniz Research Institute for Environmental Medicine GmbH (IUF)
- Leibniz Research Centre for Working Environment and Human Factors at TU Dortmund University (IfADo)
- University of Konstanz, CAAT (CAAT)
- University of Veterinary Medicine Hannover, Foundation (TiHo)
- Technical University of Berlin (TUB)
- Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg (MLU)
- Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT)

The French Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health & Safety (Agence nationale de sécurité sanitaire de l'alimentation, de l'environnement et du travail, ANSES) is responsible for the Europe-wide coordination of PARC. A complete list of all participating partners can be found here.

How do citizens benefit from PARC?

Various research projects within the PARC partnership are specifically investigating the health effects of certain groups of chemicals. One example is mycotoxins, i. e. toxic substances produced by certain moulds (fungi). If the investigation reveals that a substance poses health risks, these research results serve, for example, as a basis for the European Commission to set limit values and other measures. Thanks to Europe-wide cooperation within the framework of PARC, this work can be carried out more quickly.

In addition, the BfR is working within the framework of PARC to ensure that new scientific methods for risk assessment can be put into practice more quickly and used, for example, in legally prescribed testing procedures. Potential risks to human health can be identified more quickly and, if necessary, eliminated.

The division of work within the partnership and the development of new, improved methods also make risk assessment more efficient and cost-effective. PARC thus also contributes to the responsible use of taxpayers' money.

Who finances the PARC network?

The EU provides half of the funding for the PARC network. The funds come from the "Horizon Europe" programme , the European framework programme for research and innovation. The other half is funded by the respective partners.

The total funding volume for PARC amounts to approximately 400 million euros over a period of seven years. The project officially started in May 2022 and will run until April 2029.

What are the BfR's tasks within PARC?

The German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) has important steering and coordination functions within the PARC partnership. As a signatory to the grant agreement, the BfR is represented on the PARC administrative and steering committees. Among other things, these committees decide on joint activities and research projects.

In addition, the BfR, together with the French agency ANSES, leads the technical work package on hazard assessment and, within the framework of PARC, coordinates the activities of the "PARC National Hub" together with the Federal Environment Agency. The PARC National Hub discusses, among other things, the work of the German partner institutions.

The BfR is also involved in the content-related work of PARC in various areas. For example, the BfR is investigating the hazards posed by certain mould toxins and developing alternative methods for detecting potentially carcinogenic substances. Another research project involves the development of methods for detecting substances that influence metabolism and can thus contribute to obesity.

In addition to research work on specific chemicals and methods, the BfR also participates in PARC projects aimed at refining knowledge transfer, knowledge management, the reorientation of European risk assessment of chemicals and the long-term measures necessary in the field of chemical assessment in Europe. The aim is to make the knowledge gained on individual substances and methods more accessible and, where necessary, to incorporate it more quickly into political decisions.

Further information on the role of the BfR can be found here.

What is the "PARC National Hub" and what are the BfR's responsibilities within it?

Expert committees known as "National Hubs" have been set up in all PARC member states. Their purpose is to discuss work results and important questions relating to working

methods. At the same time, the hubs are also intended to facilitate links with institutions and interest groups beyond the partner institutions that are directly involved. For this reason, external experts and representatives of the relevant national ministries are also invited to participate in the national hubs. At the same time, they also facilitate exchanges with, for example, state authorities, associations or NGOs within the framework of various events.

The German PARC National Hub is jointly supported by the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment and the Federal Environment Agency. The two authorities have divided the work between them and assigned it to two sub-committees, known as sub-hubs.

The “Human Tox” sub-hub at the BfR focuses on issues relating to human toxicology, i. e. the effects of "toxic substances" on the human body and the assessment of possible risks that may arise as a result. An important role is also played by the question of how and in what amounts humans come into contact with the substances in question (see our FAQ on the difference between risk and hazard).

Further information on the role of the BfR can be found here.

What specific projects and research tasks does the BfR organise through PARC?

Within the framework of PARC, the BfR is involved in the following projects and sub-tasks, among others:

- “Prioritisation”
  This project collects information on substances and substance groups for which there is currently insufficient scientific knowledge. At the same time, it clarifies which of these substances most urgently require further information for political decision-makers.
- “Knowledge management and uptake into policy”
  This project develops tools and procedures to improve and speed up the exchange of data obtained within the framework of PARC and to incorporate it into political decisions. Core projects here are the knowledge platform "PARCopedia" and the development of strategic plans for the introduction of new, innovative methods for legally required risk assessments.
- “Mycotoxins” (mould toxins)
  This project is initially investigating potential health risks posed by certain mould toxins (enniatins and Alternaria toxins).
- “Non-genotoxic carcinogens (NGTxCs)”
  This project develops methods for investigating potentially carcinogenic chemicals.
- “Metabolic endocrine disorders”
  This project investigates chemicals that disrupt the body's metabolism and can thus contribute to the formation of excess weight and obesity.
- “Endocrine disruptors”
  This project contributes to the refinement of methods that investigate the effects of chemicals on the thyroid gland.
- “Regulatory application”
  This project aims to improve the application of new and alternative methods in regulatory procedures to reduce animal experiments.

A detailed overview of the BfR's work within the framework of PARC can be found here.

Further information on the BfR website on PARC

PARC at a glance: EU Partnership for Chemical Safety
https://www.bfr.bund.de/en/research/partnership-for-the-assessment-of-risk-from-chemicals-parc/

Press Release: Moulds and Mycotoxins: Invisible Hazards in Food. A BfR Podcast on Mycotoxins and International Research
https://www.bfr.bund.de/en/press-release/moulds-and-mycotoxins-invisible-hazards-in-food/

About the BfR

The German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) is a scientifically independent institution within the portfolio of the German Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Regional Identity (BMLEH). It protects people's health preventively in the fields of public health and veterinary public health. The BfR provides advice to the Federal Government as well as the Federal States ('Laender') on questions related to food, feed, chemical and product safety. The BfR conducts its own research on topics closely related to its assessment tasks.

This text version is a translation of the original German text which is the only legally binding version.

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