

## **Delphi Survey on risk perception and ranking in the field of consumer health protection**

BfR Project Description, 1 July 2007

Whether a substance, product or food is seen as risky and, by extension, as threatening depends on a number of factors, only some of which can be influenced. In order to establish the appropriate way of dealing with these differences, reliable information was to be collected on risk perception by BfR stakeholders. The main question examined in the project was which risks are seen as relevant or less relevant by the individual stakeholder groups. A Delphi survey on the perception and ranking of risks in the field of consumer health protection was conducted amongst various BfR stakeholders in order to answer this question.

### **Project management agency**

BfR

**Department:** Risk Communication

**Unit:** Risk research, perception, early detection, impact assessment

### **Co-operation partner**

Prognos AG ([www.prognos.com](http://www.prognos.com))

### **Project term**

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### **Funding agency**

BfR

Whether a substance, product or food is seen as risky and, by extension, as threatening depends on a number of factors, only some of which can be influenced. In order to establish the appropriate way of dealing with these differences, reliable information was to be collected on risk perception by BfR stakeholders. The project mainly focused on the following questions:

- Which risk is seen as relevant or less relevant by the individual stakeholder groups?
- Based on this perception, how do BfR stakeholders rank the risks?
- How do the perceptions / rankings of the BfR stakeholders compare with each other and with the rankings of scientific experts?
- What statements can be made about the reasons for the differences in risk perception?

A Delphi survey on the perception and ranking of risks in the field of consumer health protection was conducted amongst various BfR stakeholders in order to answer these questions. The participants in the survey were, therefore, representatives of political and administrative circles, representatives of the trade and industry (including associations), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), experts and lay persons. Unlike a standard survey, a Delphi study does not seek to be representative. In this case, an exactly defined group of experts or representatives from the above-mentioned groups is invited to take part. The participants in the Delphi study were chosen on the basis of their membership of one of the above-mentioned stakeholder groups. Twelve risks from four of BfR's work areas were selected for the surveys:

- Avian influenza
- Zoonosis: *Campylobacter*
- Antibiotic resistance
- Pesticides: organophosphates
- Allergies: nickel
- Chemicals in breast milk
- Bisphenol A in babies' bottles
- Lamp oils
- Tattoos
- Food supplements: folic acid
- Mycotoxins: aflatoxin B1
- Heat-related reactants in food: acrylamide

The Delphi study supplied the following results:

- an assessment of the relevance of perceived risks within the BfR stakeholder groups
- an analysis of the perception and rating within and between groups; a comparison with indicator values from toxicology and public health
- risk ranking based on the perception of stakeholder groups
- overall risk ranking based on the results of the individual risk rankings of the stakeholder groups.