RISK MANAGEMENT OF OCCUPATIONAL EXPOSURE TO PESTICIDES

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Risk management is an integrated part of Risk Assessment. There is no reason to assess the risk if it is not managed and communicated to the stakeholders.

The process of occupational risk management, on account of exposure to pesticides, should be determined on a case-by-case basis. However, some basic assumptions need to be considered. Certainly the technical ability and economic feasibility are among these. It is of no benefit to have a technically outstanding solution but economically unviable.

The understanding of the limitations and virtues of the Risk Assessment process is essential for the proper management. Establishing an "acceptable" risk is not an easy task and it is often exacerbated by political and ideological factors. Acceptable risks are based on the assumption that for any event there is a non-zero probability level.

There is no human activity devoid of risk.

The complete absence of risk is an unattainable goal. Safety and health are related to the level of risk that society deems to be reasonable in the context, and in comparison with other risks of daily life. Source: FAO / WHO Expert Consultation, January 1997.

Risk management is, on principle, an equilibrium act. "The important thing is to find the right balance, and not overreact. The government has the duty to ensure appropriate and effective protection of the citizens, but we do not live nor can we live in a society free of risks. Societies which venture innovate and grow; Societies which do not face risks wither. Attaining the right balance (according to the risk) will require the participation and commitment of all involved in the debate. "Peter Kilfoyle MP, Parliamentary Secretary in the Office of Public Service.

A risk comparison seems to be an appropriate tool for the understanding of this process. Combined with an approach favoring negotiation and consensus, it leads to positive and consistent results. When the resources are not available to regulate all the risks, we must focus our attention on the highest risks. Prioritizing is not an easy task. The limit of regulation should be the limit of toxicological concern, which in turn is related to the limits of science. Growing public demand for security must be addressed in the risk management. However, previously established regulatory standards may limit the risk management. In particular, for pesticides, this has been a limiting factor. The "prevention" or the "principle of better safe than sorry" is often used where there is a breakdown of communication between politicians and scientists.

Surely the proper management of risks, arising from occupational exposure to pesticides, requires technical and scientific knowledge in the areas of toxicology, public health and agriculture. A multidisciplinary approach is an integrating part of this process. Nowadays there is available technology for an adequate management of these risks, which is closely linked to good agricultural practices and occupational health.