

@Risk: Strengthening Canada’s Ability to Manage Risk
A Project of the University of Ottawa’s Institute for Science, Society and Policy

The @Risk research and engagement project aims to contribute recommendations to policy-makers and regulators on when and how to incorporate broader public values into risk management processes. Research is focused on how to better address tensions that arise in public decision-making when experts and public stakeholders have different perceptions and preferences for how to deal with hazards and risk issues.

We are looking to connect with policy-makers, regulators, non-government organizations and others to exchange knowledge and ideas. We are also recruiting partner organizations and exploring topics for a planned expansion of the project in 2019.

Approach

@Risk compares aspects of risk management in three policy fields: energy, public health, and genomics. The project focuses on six case studies where there are differences in the newness of the technology, media attention, and levels of regulation:

- nuclear waste management
- mammography screening
- newborn screening
- hydraulic fracturing
- childhood vaccination
- gene-edited foods

So far, we have detailed the mechanisms for stakeholder input, risk decision-making, and the information and communications environment. Concepts and frameworks to compare cases are being developed, including ways to compare the degree to which individuals can make their own choices when it comes to risk, the risk management approach (regulatory, economic, technological, etc.), and the transparency, inclusiveness, and accountability of decision-making processes. The project explores the concept of ‘motivated reasoning’—that both experts and the general public have a tendency to be selective in the evidence they have faith in—and how this might affect risk perception differences.

Who is involved to date?

@Risk is led by the University of Ottawa’s Institute for Science, Society and Policy. The project includes researchers from 11 Canadian and U.S. universities and four partner organizations: the Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA), Canadian Nuclear Laboratories (CNL), the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC), and the Genetic Engineering and Society Center (GES) at North Carolina State University. An Advisory Council composed of practitioners and policy-makers provides guidance and networks for the project.

Project Funding

Core funding for @Risk is provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and Genome Canada (Partnership Development Grant), with additional contributions from uOttawa's Faculty of Social Sciences and project partners (Canadian Public Health Association, Canadian Nuclear Laboratories, Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, and the Genetic Engineering and Society Center at North Carolina State University).

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