

Dr Sandrine Blanchemanche
National Institute of Agronomical Research
16 rue Claude Bernard
75005 Paris
France
Email: blanchem@inapg.inra.fr

Communication about environmental hazards

Sandrine Blanchemanche* (National Institute of Agronomical Research, Paris, France),
Stephan Marette (National Institute of Agronomical Research, Paris, France), Jutta Roosen
(University of Kiel, Germany), Philippe Verger ((National Institute of Agronomical
Research, Paris, France)

Recently, several regulatory bodies have used advisories in order to reduce risky consumer behaviour. An advisory is supposed to overcome the consumers' lack of knowledge. In particular, we analyzed the impact of a fish consumption advisory on methylmercury targeted to pregnant women, childbearing women and young children. A five-month regulatory experiment with 200 French households was implemented to evaluate the impact of an advisory. Based on a risk assessment process, it aimed at informing people about hazards (coming from mercury) and benefits (coming from omega 3). It also gave recommendations for avoiding some species and keeping the benefits of eating fish. We found that even though consumers correctly perceive the health hazard, their probability of judgment of adverse health effects is biased downward. Consequently, they decrease their consumption, but insufficiently enough to comply with the advisory. Moreover, they have difficulties recalling species mentioned in the advisory, except for tuna that is often consumed. These results raise the sociological question of understanding decision-making under uncertainty and the mechanisms upon which actors rely when they determine their actions. We underline cognitive, behavioural and institutional limitations when people have to use information to estimate the probability of a risky event.