

How does the Scientific Committee Health, Environmental and Emerging Risks help protect people and the environment?

The role of the Scientific Committee on Health, Environmental and Emerging Risks (SCHEER) is to alert the European Commission services of any emerging issues and risks that could negatively affect human health or the environment. By identifying these issues and risks quickly, we can take quick and appropriate action to prevent or reduce any negative impact.

→ WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN EMERGING ISSUE AND AN EMERGING RISK?

An **emerging issue** is defined as one that has very recently been identified and for which the available data base to conduct a risk assessment is very limited. In order to conclude if the issue indeed poses a health risk, a proper risk assessment needs to be performed.

An **emerging risk** refers to an effect resulting from a newly identified hazard to which an exposure may occur or from new or increased exposure and/or susceptibility to a known hazard.

→ WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DO NOT RECOGNISE THE IMPLICATIONS OF A PARTICULAR EMERGING ISSUE?

Not recognising the implications of a particular emerging issue or risk to human health or the environment can lead to serious problems. Action might be taken too late or the wrong action might be taken, with little or no effect on reducing or managing the risk. In addition, people might lose confidence in scientific risk assessment, and even begin to mistrust science itself.

→ WHAT IS THE SCHEER'S APPROACH?

The SCHEER does not wait for problems to materialise or to worsen, they are proactive and try to identify emerging issues and risks that might be of concern very early on. They regularly hold brainstorming sessions to explore and identify these issues and risks, and follow-up with in-depth discussions

about how these might develop, how to prioritise them and what data are needed to decrease uncertainties. The SCHEER does not work alone; they call upon scientists and stakeholders from around the world for their valuable input and insight.

→ WHERE DOES THE SCHEER GET ITS INFORMATION?

SCHEER's main sources of information are:

- the active input of all members of the SCHEER in identifying emerging and newly identified health and environmental risks;
- periodic search of literature, data mining;
- feedback from other national, EU and non-EU scientific advisory committees.

In considering emerging issues, the SCHEER seeks close collaboration with other international scientific advisory committees that are also responsible for identifying emerging issues.

→ HOW DOES THE SCHEER PRIORITISE EMERGING ISSUES AND RISKS?

The SCHEER uses a weight-of-evidence process, based on a subjective judgement of agreed criteria. What matters most is the potential impact to health and/or the environment: issues such as scientific interest are put aside. In addition to prioritising based on the severity of the impact (with any life-threatening threats taking precedence), other criteria are the scale of any possible impact on man or the environment, the urgency of the issue or risk and the newness or novelty of the stressor or process.

→ FOLLOW UP BY THE COMMISSION ON THE EMERGING ISSUES AND RISKS IDENTIFIED BY SCHEER

The role of the SCHEER is to draw the European Commission services' attention to emerging issues and provide relevant advice. The SCHEER regularly reviews any relevant

new developments and publishes an emerging issues report at least twice during each 5-year term in which it recommends priorities to the European Commission services. However, the decision to take appropriate action and/or to investigate the possible risks of these issues lies with the Commission. If the European Commission initiates a request to work on a specific emerging issue, the SCHEER sets up a specific working group to respond to that request.

→ EXAMPLES OF ISSUES

In 2018, the SCHEER identified 14 emerging issues (including personal communications and listening devices; e-cigarettes; micro- and nanoplastics in the environment; chemicals in recycled materials, and the potential effects of increases in electromagnetic radiation on wildlife). The Statement should be understood as a compilation of issues which, according to signals from various information sources, led the SCHEER to indicate to the Commission that these issues may have an impact on human health or the environment.

This factsheet is based on the June 2018 Opinion of the independent Scientific Committee on Health, Environmental and Emerging Risks (SCHEER) on "Emerging Issues and the Role of the SCHEER Position Paper (2018)" and on the SCHEER's December 2018 "Statement on emerging health and environmental issues (2018)".

These Opinions are available at:
https://ec.europa.eu/health/scientific_committees/scheer/opinions_en#fragment2