

Speaking the Same Language: Why Harmonized Terminology Matters for Science-Based Food Chemical Risk Assessment and Risk Management

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The foundation of food chemical regulations are scientific principles that have adapted over time to incorporate advances in the field of toxicological risk assessment. Yet discussions among regulators, risk assessors, industry, academics, communicators, and consumers are often complicated by inconsistent use of the terminology used to describe these scientific principles. Differences in how key concepts such as *hazard*, *risk*, *risk assessment*, *risk management*, *food additive*, and *contaminant* are used by scientists understood by consumers can create confusion, obscure scientific consensus, and contribute to public misunderstanding of food safety decisions. A recent publication¹ highlights that while risk assessment frameworks used by major authorities, including the US FDA, EFSA, and JECFA, are highly aligned, differences in how risk management decisions from these agencies are described can create the perception that these agencies are taking significantly different approaches. This presentation will examine the role of harmonized terminology in building trust in science-based regulatory frameworks, exploring how a common language supports the effective integration of the three pillars of risk analysis: risk assessment, risk management, and risk communication. The presentation will also discuss how inconsistent terminology can influence regulatory decision-making, public perception, and stakeholder trust, especially in an era characterized by rapid dissemination of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation. By improving consistency in the use of toxicological and regulatory terms, stakeholders can better communicate the scientific basis of food safety decisions, facilitate international regulatory alignment, and support transparent, evidence-based policies.

¹ Rivera-González, et al. Principles of food safety and toxicological risk assessment: Refining hazards, risk management communication, and common misconceptions. 2026. Compr Rev Food Sci Food Saf. 25(4): e70552. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/42422975/>