

How can scientific advances support regulatory risk assessment for pesticides?

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The use of Plant Protection Products (PPPs, or pesticides) by farmers for crop protection in Europe requires that the product has undergone a full evaluation and met the requirements that govern its registration and availability to use. The principles of this registration are, for Europe laid down in Regulation 1107/2009/EC. The purpose of this regulation is to ensure a high level of protection of both humans (including any vulnerable groups) and animals and the environment. Along with an increasing public and political interest in environmental issues, the science behind registration decisions and related risk assessments has recently been under scrutiny, with in some cases rapid inclusion into the political debate. The resulting abundant literature published in general or scientific journals illustrate the complexity of the issues a risk assessment deals with, as well as the confliction between scientific data and scientific evidence. The complexity is, real and when added to limited awareness of the input and limitations of the risk assessment process and of related science, most often leads to difficulties in reaching an appropriate regulatory balance based on current scientific evidence. In this context it is important to be clear about what the current state-of-the-art regulatory science can achieve, and also what it cannot. As a result, this session aims to investigate the risk assessment schemes for PPPs described in guidance documents prepared by expert groups (EFSA, European Commission) and the science under pinning them. . We hope to achieve this by bringing together industry, CRO's, regulators, researchers and the public and providing a holistic review of new developments in ecotoxicology for regulatory risk assessment. The initial experiences of the implementation of new guidance documents and novel methods for higher tier effects testing (e.g. bee, endocrine effects testing, aquatic etc.) and risk assessment will be reviewed. How risk assessment for Plant Protection Products (PPP, or pesticides) relies on scientific evidence, supported by these dedicated studies in the laboratory or in the field will then be discussed. The session will then aim to propose descriptions of the purpose of a risk assessment scheme, illustrating how to balance and weigh the scientific data to enable reliable evidence based decision making. The session will also aim to illustrate "weight of evidence" approaches, how they are defined, how they are built on the basis of scientific data and how they are used in a risk assessment process. Overall, this session aims at providing a better understanding on how science best feeds into risk assessment procedures and hopefully will bring some input on how to better communicate the risk assessment process and inputs, to a wider audience. It is also hoped to provide the scientific community with a better understanding of the process of developing novel testing approaches and regulatory guidance documents to serve the evaluation procedure of Plant Protection Products (PPP).

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