

Sharing knowledge on emerging contaminants and PFAS

M. van Houten¹, P.A. Alphenaar²

¹Witteveen+Bos, P.O. Box 233, 7400 AE, Deventer, The Netherlands

Phone: +31-(0)-6 2394 0877

²TTE, Keizerstraat 16,7411HH, Deventer, The Netherlands

martijn.van.houten@witteveenbos.com

Introduction:

Chemicals that have not historically been considered as “contaminants” are present in the environment on a global scale. Some of these substances could be a risk to humans and the environment and others are harmless. How do we determine the difference and how do policymakers and stakeholders cooperate to address this issue?

Typical examples of these emerging contaminants are PFOS and PFOA (PFAS). Both are applied on a large scale, and both might cause a significant environmental problem. But, characteristic for emerging contaminants, too little is known about the occurrence, the actual risks and the approach to formulate appropriate standards and legislation. To properly identify how to deal with PFAS and related emerging contaminants, knowledge, awareness and understanding is essential.

Although much scientific research on emerging contaminants like PFOS and PFOA has been done, information and results are often not accessible (or not useful) outside the academic world. Because of a lack of information about the presence in our soil, groundwater and sediments, decisions on how to deal with these substances are delayed, legislation is missing and practical solutions are not developed.

Methods:

In the Netherlands, we therefore started an ‘Expert centre PFAS’ to connect the fields of policy and legislation, science, stakeholders and problem owners and business communities. PFOS and PFOA are seen as pilot substances to come to an approach on how to deal with emerging contaminants and the new or upcoming substances like hormones, medicines, nano particles, etc.

By making use of the case PFAS, the following challenges are explored:

- which decisions about emerging contaminants have to be made at different levels (production, business, research, policy and legislation);
- which information about emerging contaminants is essential to make these decisions;

- how to ensure that scientific information about emerging contaminants is used in practice, and that people act accordingly. And the other way around: how can practice address important issues and examples to science.

Goal of the Expert centre is to share knowledge about emerging contaminants, in particular PFAS. With this initiative we want to create a ‘playing field’, in which policy makers in different countries can use the same information about emerging contaminants to base their policy on and explore cost effective and sustainable strategies to deal with these issues.

Commissioned by the Dutch and Flemish government - and with help of all the Common Forum members - a questionnaire is made for policymakers in the EU. This questionnaire is also sent to organisations in the USA, Australia, Norway and to the member of the NICOLE network and SedNet network. This questionnaire is about the knowledge, the approach and the results of their policy to constrain the problems of emerging contaminants in soil, groundwater and sediments.

Results:

The results of this questionnaire and the conclusions and recommendations will be collected in July and August 2015. On the SedNet Conference 2015 we will present the first impressions, conclusions and recommendations of this questionnaire.

Discussion:

We will address some items to discuss, based on the first results of the questionnaire. We will focus this discussion on topics that are related to river basin management and sediments.

References:

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