ABNE

Communication for Biosafety Regulators

Introduction

Purpose of biosafety communication is to

- keep stakeholders well informed of
  - the national biosafety process
  - requirements for applications
  - how decisions are made
- address the concerns of interested and affected parties

Risk communication

- The perception – society wants “zero” risk
- The reality - no such thing as “zero risk”
- Two aspects, communicate about the
  1. regulatory process
  2. safety of transgenic products and activities

Risk communication

- Risk communication is a legal requirement i.e.
  - legal mandate to implement biosafety
  - activities that are regulated
  - roles for various government agencies in biosafety regulation
- Generally, government departments are required to raise awareness of:
  - their function
  - what transgenic activities are regulated
- High visibility is important for raising stakeholder compliance

Biosafety vs. biotech info

- Regulators must focus on delivering biosafety information
- Questions about biotechnology and the benefits of approved products should be referred to local scientists
- Important for regulators to maintain neutrality by
  - not promoting or negating biotechnology
  - providing neutral assessment of facts and decisions
  - using prepared wording and templates
- This will help build trust and credibility

Communication strategy

- Communication is a two way process
  - give and receive information (speaking and listening)
- Enable input into policy development and decisions by sharing information and getting feedback
- However, scope of biosafety communication is wide
- Rarely enough resources to do all the important communication
- Preparing a communication strategy helps ensure that maximum impact is achieved with the available resources

Features of a well planned strategy

- A multi-pronged approach
- Focused on the specific needs of specific stakeholder groups
- Timely in terms of message delivery
- Designed to obtain feedback
- Proactive
- Prepared & ready to be reactive

Strategy development

- Planned by the national biosafety office
- Reflects the purpose and goals identified
- Identifies key stakeholders
  - Who; what info they want/need; how to package the information; how to deliver it; when to deliver it; when and how to gather feedback.
- Prepared messages

Key components of strategy

- Determine the purpose of each piece of communication
- Identify stakeholders
  - group them according to information requirements
- Consult stakeholder groups on their biosafety communication needs
- Establish key messages about biosafety
- Create a timeline and work plan for delivery of critical communication

Key components of strategy

- Identify effective communication tools for specific components of the strategy
- Identify best communicators for specific stakeholder groups
- Establish protocols for emergency communication, and
- Implement communication strategy within resource constraints.

Develop a timeline

- Identify key communication opportunities e.g.,
  - Implementation of the law
  - Release of regulations, guidelines & other biosafety tools
  - Opportunities for public participation
  - Decisions
  - Changes in processes, etc.

Develop a timeline

- Anticipate when these will happen and plan timeline accordingly
- Look for existing outreach opportunities and plan to use these
  - Portfolio meetings, exhibitions, farmers days
- Be prepared for unplanned needs
  - *e.g.*, emergency communication (develop strategy)

ABNE's approach

- Needs audit and building on prior progress
- Use of
  - an ABNE communication manual for biosafety regulators
  - Workbook with activities after presentations
    - Workbook forms the basis of a communication strategy for the NBA

Training Programme

Component	Activity
Introduction to biotechnology/ biosafety	
Purpose and responsibilities for biosafety communication	Identify purpose and legal responsibilities for communication
Principles for effective biosafety communication Lessons learned in biosafety communication	Experience sharing
Communication strategy development	Identify key target stakeholder groups
Communication strategy development – Messages	Identify – Key messages/Message maps/Quick messages
Channels and tools for communication	Match stakeholders to best channels and tools

Training Programme

Component	Activity
Communicating biosafety decisions	Identify Contents of biosafety decision documents
Public Participation – Raising awareness/ Consultations/Media interaction	Workgroups: Challenges and misinformation
Emergency communication protocols	Draft the steps and responsibilities of an emergency biosafety Communication protocol for the national biosafety office
Agency-specific communication	List the communication templates that could be useful for each agency and body involved in national biosafety implementation
Monitoring & evaluating communication	
Building communication capacity	

Concluding remarks

- Effective communication increases stakeholders' awareness and enhances their involvement and support for biosafety processes
- A solid communications strategy allows the Competent National Authority (CNA) on Biosafety to
  - exercise control on the delivery of key messages
  - ensure the continuous and systematic process of information sharing while elevating the visibility of the Authority
- A national biosafety communications strategy plan provides the platform for
  - enhanced public understanding on issues of biosafety
  - improved quality of public participation in decision-making and policy development for biotech management and biosafety