

Author's response to reviews

Title: A framework for integrated environmental health impact assessment of systemic risks

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Author's response to reviews: see over

Editor,
Environmental Health

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Dear Editor,

MS: 4258752211935886

Thank you for your review of the above paper. I attach herewith a revised copy made in response to the referees' comments. This letter specifies responses to the main comments of the referees. As indicated in your email, these related mainly to justifying the added value that the integrated approach being promoted in the paper offers over traditional methods of risk assessment and HIA. Comments and amendments are as follows:

Comment 1 (Referee 1): Add in several specific, documented, examples that illustrate how integrated HIA has actually made a clear difference to understanding and policy response, relative to more conventional, limited, assessment.

In reality, there are as yet no real examples of applying integrated environmental health impact in the way proposed in this paper. (Case studies illustrating such assessments are being done in the INTARESE and HEIMTSA projects, on which this paper is based, but these will not be completed - and ready for publication - for about 2 years). I have, however, now added an explicit discussion of this point, and made reference to some of the more integrated HIA that have been performed (pages 13-14).

Comment 2 (Referee 2): Do the risk managers see the need for an integrated assessment as proposed?

Without doubt there is widespread recognition of the need amongst risk managers for more integrated approaches to policy - and this has been confirmed by surveys of users at regional, national and international level undertaken both by the HEIMTSA and INTARESE projects (on which this paper is based) and other projects, such as NoMIRACLE. As pointed out in the paper, in other areas of risk management (e.g. in relation to environmental policy), this need has already led to the widespread use of integrated assessment to support policies. Recent developments in policies on environment and health, especially in the EU, have emphasised this need. To address this point, I have therefore added specific reference to the European Health and Environment Strategy and Action Plan, both of which explicitly call for the development and use of more integrated approaches to assessment, and have also included reference to the International Risk Governance Council's White Paper on Risk Governance, which has laid out a clear framework for such assessments to help deal with systemic risks to health (pages 1-2).

Comment 3 (Referee 2): What are the deficits of the present risk assessment approach and the advantages of the proposed?

This is an important point that merits a detailed response. It indicates that in the original paper I had failed to convey clearly the underlying principle that integrated environmental health impact assessment was not intended to replace traditional methods of assessment, but to extend them and provide a clear conceptual framework within which to select the most appropriate methodology according to need. To address this point, therefore, I have spelt out in more detail the relationships between existing methods of assessment and the concept of integrated environmental health impact assessment proposed here (pages 4-5). I have also amended the conceptual framework (Figure 1) to show these relationships diagrammatically. In addition, I have included text emphasising that no single form of assessment serves all purposes, and that the need is thus to select the most appropriate form of assessment according to the problem under consideration. To support this, I have described in more detail how this selection should be done as part of the Issue-framing and Design stages in the assessment process - and how the concept of integrated environmental health impact assessment provides an organising framework within which to make this choice (pages 7-8).

As already noted, there are as yet no real-world examples to demonstrate the advantages of taking a more integrated approach to assessment, but as also noted I have included discussion of the added value of integration (and references to relevant studies) in pages 13-14. The following Discussion section has also been recast to consider more explicitly the limitations of integrated assessment and the challenges that need to be addressed to make it work (pages .

In addition, I have changed the title of the paper, and revised the abstract, to reflect this more explicit emphasis on framing of assessments.

In response to the further comment by referee 1, I have explained more clearly the comparative nature of CRA (pages 3-4).

I trust that these changes will be acceptable. I remain convinced that the growing demands for more integrated approaches to assessment make this a timely paper, that will make a useful contribution to the scientific and policy debates. I therefore hope that the paper will now be considered suitable for publication.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. David Briggs