The European Network on the Health and Environmental Impact of Nanomaterials

NanoImpactNet

Abstract book

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Building a bridge from NanoImpactNet to nanomedical research

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7.1.28 NanoImpactNet's Stakeholder Engagement

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NanoImpactNet (NIN) is the European network on the health and environmental impact of manufactured nanomaterials (MNMs). Functioning primarily as a coordination action and a multidisciplinary platform for exchanging research ideas, NIN shares outputs with stakeholders from academia, industry, professional associations, legislators, regulators, and civil society across Europe and beyond. NIN identifies stakeholders' interests and needs to improve this communication.

NIN has organised a series of workshops to discuss who needs or wants to know what, and how this can be facilitated, with the ultimate goal of a healthy future in a world with MNMs. Scientific cooperation and dialogue between researchers and other stakeholders were the staring points for these three meetings on:

1. Defining knowledge gaps in current research on MNM characterisation for use in life cycle assessments, as well as identifying MNM behaviour in the environment.
2. 'How to make industrial data available' - strategies for sharing potentially sensitive proprietary (or negative) data and for allowing the comparison of protocols.
3. 'How to inform the public about nano-enhanced food contact materials' – a sensitive and potentially contentious debate will ensue if legislation fails to encourage communication.

All stakeholders agree that much more scientific data must be generated and shared, notably on: potential toxic and safety hazards of MNMs throughout their lifecycles; fate and persistence of MNMs in humans, animals and the environment and thus risks associated with MNM exposure, for which researchers and workers are in the front line. Also highlighted was the need for: nomenclature, standards, methodologies, benchmarks and protocols; development of best practice guidelines; voluntary schemes on responsibility; and databases of MNMs, research topics and themes.

Broadly speaking, NIN's stakeholder sessions have shown: that regulatory agencies are confident in Europe's monitoring, control, expertise and legislation, whether for chemicals, pharmaceuticals or food; that industries using or producing MNMs are positive that they have the know-how to deal with MNMs because they see them as chemical, pharmaceutical or biological problems - they do not wish to take undue risks with MNMs; and that consumers will probably embrace nanotechnologies which improve their lives, as long as communication on risks is transparent and from trustworthy sources.

Our workshops have shown that NIN researchers and other stakeholders share very similar knowledge needs, and that open communication and free movement of knowledge are wanted by and will benefit all parties. We encourage all organisations with a stake in the possible health and environmental impacts that nanotechnologies may have to be active members of NIN, to ensure safe and responsible development, production, use and disposal of MNMs.

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