

## Perception and Assessment of Risks The »Risk Survey Baden-Württemberg 2001«

### Abstract

In addition to technophobia the presumed fear of risk of the public is regarded as one of the impediments to technological innovations and economic revival. The »Risk Survey 2001« the Center for Technology Assessment commissioned and carried out as a cooperation project with the University of Stuttgart, does away with these prejudices: The representative interviews of 1.508 people in Baden-Württemberg and 62 free-response interviews verify that many risks are perceived as 'normal' concomitant symptoms of life in a modern industrial society and produce rather scant fears. Only one of six persons feels threatened by BSE (mad cow disease), genetically modified food, criminality, nuclear power stations or smoking, only one of 25 fears the radiation of mobile phones and transmitting stations. Only the global climate change is feared dramatically: One of five persons fears it, but half of the persons interviewed see there a high catastrophe potential for the future.

Concerning the question what makes risks acceptable, not so much fears as rather rational judgements people come to after weighing up personal and particularly societal potentials of benefit and detriments play a role. Followed by the assessment of the institutional performance in risk communication and management and, on third place, individual value orientations: People with technocrat orientation to advancement prove to be over-averagely prepared to take risks, whereas the protagonists of a culture-pessimist alternative life-style voice stronger reservations regarding the examined sources of risks. Concerning the question of acceptability three classes of risks single out – although there were given many ambivalent answers: the risks of radiation of mobile telephony come off the best, followed by the global climate and nuclear power risks. Risks that can be incorporated as food or semi-luxury foods are perceived to be clearly more critical: 43% of the persons asked regarded the risks of smoking as unacceptable, 46% those of genetically modified food, and 56% those of meat from large-scale livestock farming.

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