

QUESTIONS

“WE HAVE TO UNDERSTAND WHAT MOVES PEOPLE”

BfR President Professor Andreas Hensel on the Scientific Council’s* opinion and the Institute’s future.



© BfR

Mr Hensel, what path does the opinion set for the future endeavours of the BfR?

The result is a very good, in some parts excellent, assessment by the Scientific Council. It almost cannot be topped; our experts have every right to be proud. It’s quite an achievement, but also a great challenge! On the one hand, because the Scientific Council always makes critical comments and suggestions for improvement, which we take seriously and which we have to work on. On the other hand, we have to live up to the expectations set by such a positive assessment. Young researchers who come to us expect a correspondingly high standard. We must not rest on our laurels.

What do you view as the greatest challenges for the BfR?

For one thing, we want to strengthen and expand our position as a point of reference within the German system of consumer health protection. At the same time, we are working on new topics. It was the Scientific Council that encouraged us to strengthen our social science research. This includes questions such as: How do consumers respond to a certain piece of news? How do they classify risks? How can we build trust? How does a message best reach its target audience? We have to understand what moves people.

The BfR also has the task of informing the public about risks. How can an institution be perceived as the voice of science in a world in which public discussions are frequently dominated by loudness, exaggeration, and one-sidedness?

I can understand that not every consumer knows us, as our work only affects them indirectly. In some ways, the BfR works behind the scenes. We are something like the “risk-whisperers” for political leaders and the media. Our work is directed towards decision-makers in government bodies, ministries, and parliaments as well as multipliers, be they consumer media, health insurance companies, doctors, veterinarians, pharmacists or the media. They all need our information on complex scientific topics. Our consumer satisfaction survey showed that those who work directly with us value the work we do. In the end, anyone who adopts and makes use of our risk assessment is a customer of ours. And that brings us back to consumers.

In 2032, the BfR will turn 30. Take a guess – where do you think the Institute will be?


The already great importance of risk assessment is growing. For instance, consider food, the things we use every day, and the entire domain of preventative health-care. Risk assessment is more necessary than ever! It is crucial for the BfR to keep focussing on its scientific expertise. Certainly, we are not infallible either. A substantial part of science involves engaging with the unknown. Every experiment opens the door to a world of unknowns and new questions. It is the principle of trial and error. After all, this approach has led us to travel comfortably by train, to fly to the moon, and to eat delicious meals that we could not have dreamed of 100 years ago. The work of the BfR is also making a small contribution to this positive development. We are making the world a safer place. —

**The Scientific Council advises the German Federal Government and the Federal States ('Laender') in matters concerning universities and research institutions. The Council conducts assessments (evaluations) and publishes corresponding statements and recommendations.*

INTERNA

On the lookout

A full renewal of the BfR-Commissions: External experts are needed for the 2026–2029 period. Within these independent commissions, they will advise the BfR in the areas of food and feed, chemicals, and product safety on a volunteer basis. Interested parties can apply via the BfR website starting from January 2025. The selection of the candidates will be performed by an independent committee.

 **More information**



BfR information
"Commissions at the BfR"

Legal notice

BfR2GO – Issue 2/2024

Publisher:

German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR), Institution under public law

Represented by the President,
Professor Dr Dr Dr h. c. Andreas Hensel
Responsible according to the German
Press Law: Dr Suzan Fiack

Editorial department address:

German Federal Institute for
Risk Assessment (BfR)
Max-Dohrn-Strasse 8–10
10589 Berlin, GERMANY
www.bfr.bund.de/en
publikationen@bfr.bund.de

Edited by:

BfR Press and Public Relations Unit

Design, graphics & image editing:

Studio GOOD, Berlin

Printers:

Kern GmbH, Bexbach
printed climate-neutrally on 100 percent
recycled paper (Blue Angel certificate)
with printing inks based on renewable
raw materials

Number of copies:

3,000 (German), 500 (English)

Translation:

GlobalSprachTeam Sassenberg e. K., Berlin

Print-ISSN 2567-8949

Online-ISSN 2567-8957

DOI 10.17590/20241204-153524-0

© German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment. All rights reserved. If you wish to reprint individual articles for non-commercial purposes, please contact the editors at: publikationen@bfr.bund.de

The articles are translations of the original German texts which are the only legally binding versions. The opinions of external interviewees expressed in the BfR2GO interviews reflect their own views.

The BfR science magazine BfR2GO is published twice a year.

Free subscription at:

www.bfr.bund.de/en/bfr2go_abo_en.html



German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment

Follow us:

