

# International Conference on the Management of Naturally Occurring Radioactive Materials (NORM) in Industry

VIRTUAL EVENT

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## Contribution of social sciences research to a successful NORM management: Main pitfalls and recommendations

Social sciences, those disciplines that deal with human action in its social and cultural aspects, can contribute significantly and meaningfully to the management of NORM exposure situations. However, despite an increased institutional recognition of the need for research on societal aspects in NORM management, and acknowledgement of the need for a holistic approach where technical and social science disciplines work together, social science involvement in the NORM field remains fleeting and scattered.

Experts from demography, sociology, psychology, political sciences, science and technology studies and other forms of social science expertise rarely gain the opportunity to apply their knowledge, contribute to the harmonisation of approaches and the adoption of good practices that are both cost effective and safe, and take into consideration the protection of the public and workers. Incomplete socio-economic studies, the low acceptance of remediation projects, a mismatch in stakeholder opinions, views and expectations, as well as issues in radiation protection culture, are only some of the consequences of the exclusion of different social science disciplines from NORM management concerns.

This presentation will provide examples of crucial social science research contributions in different NORM exposure situations, identifies some of the main pitfalls, and concludes with recommendations for an effective, holistic approach in NORM management. For instance, the psychosocial study of the phosphogypsum ponds case in Huelva (Spain), in the framework of the Territories project, showed that participatory workshops can serve as a useful tool to involve stakeholders in the remediation decision-making. This kind of techniques are useful to collect stakeholders' views and concerns, encouraging cooperation and understanding among different interested parties regarding the best remediation option.

The presentation also describes initial actions to stimulate the integration of social sciences and humanities in research, practice and policy related to NORM management. These efforts are directed toward taking account of societal needs and aim to contribute to a better implementation of research results in practice. One action is the establishment of the Platform for Social Sciences and Humanities research relating to Ionising Radiation (SHARE) and development of a Strategic Research Agenda for Social Science and Humanities in radiation protection.

In this presentation, participants will gain an overview of the social science capacities and expertise that can be readily applied in their on-going and future NORM management projects.

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