

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

## UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY RISK ASSESSMENT FORUM CHARTER

### 1. MISSION

The mission of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Risk Assessment Forum (Forum) is to promote consensus on risk assessment issues and to inform the development of Agency risk assessment guidance in support of Agency decision making.

### 2. PURPOSE

EPA's mission is to protect human health and the environment. Since the Agency's inception, risk assessment has informed actions taken in fulfilling this mission. The array of regulatory authorities under which such assessments are conducted influences the approaches employed. In each risk assessment EPA strives for transparency and clarity. EPA also strives for consistency across the Agency in how key aspects of risk assessments are addressed, and for reasonableness in assessment findings in the context of the state of the science, as well as assumptions and science policy choices.

In light of the complicated and rapidly evolving field of risk assessment and to assist the EPA in achieving these objectives, the Forum assembles experts from across the Agency in a formal process to study and report on risk assessment issues from an Agencywide scientific perspective. In this way, the Forum facilitates the sharing of knowledge and approaches across the Agency and highlights key science policy issues.

### 3. SCOPE OF ACTIVITY

To address the Agency's science priorities and needs for decision making, the Forum focuses on topics fundamental to risk assessment and related science policy issues. Forum consensus building activities include:

- developing science policy on technical issues, risk assessment guidance, and risk assessment methodology for use in Agency decision making actions;
- conducting scientific and technical analysis to inform risk assessment approaches; and
- advancing EPA's practice of risk assessment through a variety of mechanisms including sponsoring colloquia and workshops that explore scientific and risk assessment issues.

The Forum does not provide peer review and quality assurance of risk assessments developed by EPA program offices, laboratories, centers and regions or review nonscientific risk management issues. The Forum may, however, undertake special projects at the request of the Deputy Administrator (or delegatee).

## 4. ORGANIZATION

The Forum reports to the Science and Technology Policy Council (STPC), which is chaired by the Science Advisor. The Forum confers with the STPC on the identification of Forum activities and the STPC may also recommend activities to the Forum. The STPC is informed of and may approve Forum products for public release and Agency implementation.

### 4.1 Forum Members

Forum members are selected senior scientists from Agency program offices, laboratories, centers and regions. Selection of members for the Forum is based on experience and expertise in risk assessment and underlying disciplines such as toxicology, chemistry, ecology, microbiology, epidemiology, exposure science, and statistics. Although Forum membership is not based on office affiliation, the over-all composition of the Forum reflects a balance of scientific disciplines and Agency experience.

The **Forum Chair** is appointed by the Deputy Administrator or his/her designee in consultation with the Science Advisor. Responsibilities of the Chair include:

- chairing Forum meetings;
- developing and managing the Forum's agenda and schedule;
- advising Oversight Committees and Technical Panels, as appropriate, to facilitate progress;
- resolving significant issues within the Forum;
- briefing the STPC on Forum activities; and
- assisting the Forum Coordinator in liaising with senior Agency officials.

### 4.2 Oversight Committees and Steering Committee

Each Forum member is assigned by the Forum Coordinator to one of three **Oversight Committees**, representing special expertise and interest in the three areas of human exposure, ecology, and human health effects. One member of each Oversight Committee is elected by the Oversight Committee members, with the concurrence of the Forum Coordinator, to serve as Oversight Committee chair.

The three Oversight Committee chairs, the Forum Chair, and Forum Coordinator form the **Forum Steering Committee**. The Steering Committee is responsible for approving

proposed Forum projects and schedules, ensuring the scientific quality of Forum products, and organizing the nomination/selection of new Forum members. The Steering Committee is responsible for developing and maintaining the Forum Standard Operating Procedures.

#### **4.3 Technical Panels**

For each activity, the Forum establishes a technical panel (or other special committee) of scientific experts to conduct scientific review and analysis. Panel members are chosen to assure that necessary technical expertise is represented. Scientific experts from interested and affected EPA offices are invited to participate. Outside experts, particularly scientists from other government agencies, may be invited to participate as consultants. As appropriate, scientists from other federal agencies may be invited to participate as panel members. Each technical panel is formed by and associated with one or more of the Oversight Committees that provides technical oversight and review. Technical Panels considered to address the areas of multiple Oversight Committees may be assigned to multiple Committees. In consultation with the Oversight Committee and Forum Chair, the Forum Coordinator designates a chair who is responsible for developing a workplan, meeting deadlines, keeping the Oversight Committee(s) informed of progress and obstacles, and making regular progress reports to the Forum.

#### **4.4 Training Committee**

The Forum **Training Committee** includes both Forum and non-Forum members. This Committee was established to assist each Technical Panel in the development of materials and seminars, web-based or otherwise, to describe their product(s) to agency audiences.

#### **4.5 Forum Staff**

The Forum's logistical and operational needs are met by a dedicated staff based in the Office of the Science Advisor. The staff is comprised of a Forum Coordinator and Science Coordinators.

Forum Staff responsibilities include:

- disseminating information about Forum activities and coordinating internal and external reviews of Forum documents;
- notifying the STPC of Forum projects, including workplans and schedules;
- securing support and necessary resources for Forum projects;
- notifying supervisors of new members in writing of their Forum status and attendant responsibilities, including time and resources which are expected to be dedicated to Forum activities;
- providing Forum members with regular status reports including descriptions of ongoing projects, panel chairs and schedules; and

- organizing Forum meetings, distributing pre-meeting materials and assisting Forum members in organizing work group meetings, colloquia, teleconferences and workshops.

The **Forum Coordinator**, selected by the EPA Science Advisor or his/her designee, functions as the chief operating officer of the Forum, coordinating Forum staff to ensure that all logistical and operational needs of the Forum are met, including:

- facilitating the process of the nomination and selection of Forum members;
- working with agency offices and regions involved to present issues to the Forum;
- obtaining extramural support for Forum projects;
- serving as liaison between the Forum and senior Agency officials and with other EPA and non-EPA organizations/agencies; and
- submitting progress reports from the Forum to the Science Advisor and Deputy Administrator or his/her designee.

The Forum Coordinator also assists the Forum Chair in his/her responsibilities including resolution of significant issues.

The **Science Coordinators** selected by the EPA Science Advisor (or his/her designee), in consultation with the Forum Coordinator, support the work of the Oversight Committees and technical panels by:

- providing logistical and operational support with regard to workplans, meetings and products;
- facilitating the work of Committees and Technical Panels
- serving as liaison between technical panels and Oversight Committees; and
- coordinating production, review, and revision of projects and documents.

## 5. FORUM MEMBERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITIES

### 5.1 Membership

Members are appointed for four year staggered terms, rotating half the membership every two years. The EPA Science Advisor will request nominations from the program offices, laboratories and regions. Candidates are nominated by their respective STPC member. Selection for membership is made by a panel consisting of the Forum Steering Committee and three Agency senior managers drawn from across the agency. The selection process attempts to balance scientific disciplines and Agency experience. In selecting Forum members, considerable weight is given to previous participation on Forum technical panels and how the candidate's expertise complements that of other members.

The Steering Committee will select new members to complete the term of any members leaving the Forum before their term expires.

## 5.2 Responsibilities

The specific responsibilities of the Forum as a whole include:

- identifying risk assessment issues appropriate for Forum review;
- establishing and supporting technical panels of scientific experts to undertake relevant analyses;
- developing guideline recommendations (changes, new methodology, or both);
- developing and articulating the scientific or technical basis for risk assessment analyses and guidelines produced by the Forum;
- promoting agencywide consensus on risk assessment issues by organizing colloquia and workshops for dialogue on special risk assessment issues;
- presenting the scientific uncertainties and limitations associated with any Forum analysis;
- identifying the science policy implications of reports and other Forum products;
- consulting, coordinating and communicating with relevant Agency offices and regions on science policy implications of Forum activities;
- responding to recommendations of the Deputy Administrator and STPC regarding Forum plans and products;
- developing training and capacity-building tools for Forum products specifically, as well as for risk assessment more broadly; and
- recommending additional scientific or technical research, as appropriate.

Individual Forum members are responsible for:

- participating in Oversight Committee meetings and full Forum meetings (by phone or in person);
- reviewing Forum documents;
- participating in at least one technical panel; and
- disseminating information about Forum activities within their offices.

## 6. PROCEDURES

**Forum Meetings.** Meetings are held on a regular basis. Forum staff develops meeting agenda based on current projects and topics submitted by Forum members. Agenda are distributed to Forum members before each full Forum meeting, along with any materials to be reviewed at that meeting. Summaries of each full Forum meeting are prepared and available to Forum members. Forum Oversight Committees meet as needed to provide appropriate oversight to their topic areas. Technical panel chairs (working with the Forum staff) are responsible for reporting their progress to the Forum.

**Selecting Forum Activities.** New activities may be proposed at any time. Proposals for projects to be considered by the Forum can be developed within individual regions and

program offices and presented to the STPC for their concurrence. Project proposals are then recommended to the Forum by the STPC Chair. Forum projects may additionally be identified by the Deputy Administrator (or delegatee). Projects are also identified by the Forum for STPC consideration. Proposed projects are evaluated by the Steering Committee. Criteria for choosing projects may include: Agencywide applicability, new or emerging risk assessment issues, opportunity for developing Agencywide consensus, current project work load, and availability of scientific staff to serve as panel members. The respective Oversight Committee develops a project charge and recruits appropriate expertise for the Technical Panel. The Forum Chair is responsible for informing the STPC of the initiation of new projects.

**Processing Forum Products.** The chair(s) of each technical panel is responsible for developing and adhering to a workplan that is mutually agreeable to technical panel members, Oversight Committee(s) and the Steering Committee. The technical panel coordinates with the Forum staff throughout development of the project, and briefs the Oversight Committee(s) and Forum at regular intervals. Draft Forum products are provided for comment to the Oversight Committee(s) during their development. Document completion is in accordance with EPA peer review policy, and distribution is subject to Oversight Committee, Forum and STPC clearance, as appropriate. At the clearance stage, the technical panel chair(s) provides a summary of the technical findings, conclusions and recommendations, with comment on key scientific issues, uncertainties, and possible policy implications. The technical panel chair(s), with assistance from the Forum Training Committee and Forum staff, and oversight committee review, prepares communication and training materials for distribution to the Agency upon product completion.

Major Forum recommendations and guidance documents are submitted to the STPC, chaired by the Science Advisor for consideration of their use as EPA risk assessment policy.

## **7. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND EXTERNAL PEER REVIEW**

Internal Forum meetings are considered deliberative and are not open to the public. The Forum may seek public input on risk assessment issues at specific times in the development of its products. Opportunities for input include Forum-sponsored colloquia and workshops convened to obtain input from members of the scientific community on particular risk assessment issues. In accordance with Agency peer review policy, the Forum organizes reviews of its products by external peer review panels. Some Forum products, such as risk assessment guidelines, are published in the Federal Register for formal public review. In finalizing its reports, the Forum takes under advisement the comments received through this public involvement process. As appropriate, the final documents are made available publically upon completion.