

The Risk Governance of nanotechnology: recommendations for managing a global issue

**Welcome address on 6 July 2006 by
Fritz Gutbrodt, Head of Swiss Re Centre for Global Dialogue**

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a privilege and pleasure to welcome you to the Swiss Re Centre for Global Dialogue and to the conference on a risk governance framework for nanotechnology convened by the International Risk Governance Council.

On behalf of all partners to the project I would like to thank the IRGC for this most valuable initiative of defining a risk governance approach.

With about 300 products worldwide using man-made structures on the nanoscale we are talking about a market that is still in all senses of the world very small. But with the estimates published in the IRGC White Paper of \$1 trillion worth of products by the year 2015 and about 2 million workers employed in this new emerging industry, we are talking about a rapidly growing technology and business.

Defining a risk governance framework thus becomes all important in order to enable and indeed protect the planning of investments into nanotechnology. The IRGC initiative is a perfect example, I think, of how risk management becomes part of innovation management.

I also see this conference as an important step of shaping public risk perception. In today's information & media society the perception of risks by different stakeholders needs to be managed carefully wherever possible, and one might indeed say that the task of managing that perception is itself a considerable risk – and an opportunity.

Let me conclude by expressing my joy at seeing you all gathered here at our Centre for Global Dialogue. Swiss Re published a study on nanotechnology, its risks and possible implications for insurance in 2004. Since then we organised an international stakeholder conference and also offered the Centre as a platform for students of the ETH, the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, to present their findings of a case study on the risk perception and the business opportunities of nanotechnology.

We are glad to support the IRGC in getting all future discussions of nanotechnology risks forward.

When I first thought about how I should welcome you, it was a hot and serene summer day. The weather seemed to describe perfectly the climate in which this conference takes place. In the meantime, last night, there has been some thunder and lightning, and I have heard that some of you were actually diverted to Geneva because of the storm. This is not indicative of today's discussions, I assume, but the fact that I had to change the last words of my warm welcome with its facile comparison with a limitless blue sky shows perhaps that stakeholder dialogue is not about issuing an easy forecast. It is more about how you react to the weather.

And well, actually, you – as stakeholders – *are* the good weather.

I wish you a productive and interesting conference.

With this I hand over to Timothy Walker, member of the IRGC Scientific and Technical Council, who will be chairing the Opening Session.