

Peter Simmons

School of Environmental Sciences

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It is one of the largest and longest established environmental science departments in Europe

The School has an international reputation and was the only environmental sciences department awarded a 5** rating in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise

We have 70 faculty, 120 researchers and about 200 postgraduate students

The School has several research centres and groups. The Centre for Environmental Risk was established in 1986

Background

Disciplinary background originally in sociology

1991 Centre for Science Studies and Science Policy,
Lancaster University

1992 Centre for the Study of Environmental Change,
Lancaster University

2001 School of Environmental Sciences, UEA

Main research interests

The public's experience and understanding of and responses to environmental and technological risk, with a particular interest in spatially 'situated' risk

Stakeholder involvement in decision making processes

Risk communication/framing processes

Public understanding of risk

Living with industrial major accident hazards

Living with nuclear risk

Radioactive waste management options

Energy options and new nuclear build

Other research has examined public views of various new technologies, including genetically modified crops and foods, mobile telecommunications, genetic testing and stem cell research.

Living with major industrial hazards

Commissioned by the UK Health and Safety Executive

Comparative case study of 7 major accident hazard sites

Data collection: archival material, policy and planning documents, interviews, focus groups and Q-method

Analysis looked at the ways in which local people reasoned about risk associated with the site, including the sources of evidence on which they drew and the relationship to place

Selected results

<i>Case study site</i>	<i>Powerless, distrust, vulnerability</i>	<i>Habituation</i>	<i>Trade-offs</i>	<i>Trust in the site operator</i>	<i>Trust in the regulators</i>
Langley	X	X	X	X	
Low Moor	X	X	X	X	
Jarrow	X	X			X
Fawley	X	X	X	X	
Brinsworth	X	X			X
Llandudno	X	X			X
Frankley	X		X	X	X

Selected results

The results show broad patterns of response that are observed across different locations

However, they also highlight the importance of local context. This is supported by other research on living with 'unwanted' facilities (e.g. Elliott et al, Canada)

Contextual factors (including the nature of the hazard, the history of relations between site and community, the timing of external events) mediate these patterns of response

‘Incremental siting’

An important response at certain sites concerned the sometimes rapid growth of the facility, which led us to focus on the problem of ‘incremental siting’

One example was a chemical company that employed only 50 people in a small laboratory and warehouse facility when first established but which grew to annex all the available land around its site and to employ 2,000 people

This is a significant dimension of many current ‘siting’ disputes as they often focus on extensions to or new activities at existing sites

Living with nuclear risk

The project is part of the ESRC Priority Network on Social Contexts and Responses to Risk (SCARR)

The research has focused on two English communities with nuclear power stations, one already decommissioning

It has involved similar methods to the previous study but using in-depth interviews instead of focus groups

Preliminary results have so far identified four patterns of citizen response: 'Nuclear safety through social trust', 'Threat and distrust', 'Reluctant acceptance' and 'Cynical disengagement', showing parallels to the HSE study

Public views on radioactive waste management options



Commissioned by UK Nirex in 2000

Focus group study at 13 locations, 6 close to existing nuclear sites

Results: highlighted distrust of the nuclear industry, associated with past failures of management ('recreancy', Freudenburg). In Cumbria in particular this focused on Nirex itself, rather than the industry in general

However, also found evidence of a 'societal responsibility' discourse, with some people willing to consider repository siting if their locality should be found to be the 'best' site

Public and stakeholder involvement

Stakeholder workshop on repository monitoring and retrievability (Nirex)

Deliberative mapping workshop on radioactive waste management options (CORWM)

Stakeholder workshops on low level radioactive waste management policy (Defra)

CARL project on stakeholder involvement in radioactive waste management (Belgium, Slovenia, Sweden, UK)