

Environmental Risk Assessment (I002606)

Course size *(nominal values; actual values may depend on programme)*

Credits 5.0

Study time 150 h

Course offerings and teaching methods in academic year 2025-2026

A (semester 1)

English

Gent

lecture

seminar

practical

Lecturers in academic year 2025-2026

De Schamphelaere, Karel

LA22

lecturer-in-charge

Asselman, Jana

LA22

co-lecturer

Janssen, Colin

LA22

co-lecturer

Verougstraete, Violaine

LA22

co-lecturer

Offered in the following programmes in 2025-2026

[Bachelor of Science in Environmental Technology](#)

crdts 5

offering A

[Master of Science in Electromechanical Engineering\(main subject Control Engineering and Automation\)](#)

5

A

[Master of Science in Electromechanical Engineering\(main subject Electrical Power Engineering\)](#)

5

A

[Master of Science in Electromechanical Engineering\(main subject Maritime Engineering\)](#)

5

A

[Master of Science in Electromechanical Engineering\(main subject Mechanical Construction\)](#)

5

A

[Master of Science in Electromechanical Engineering\(main subject Mechanical Energy Engineering\)](#)

5

A

[International Master of Science in Agro- and Environmental Nematology](#)

5

A

[Master of Science in Biology](#)

5

A

[Master of Science in Bioscience Engineering: Environmental Technology](#)

5

A

[Master of Science in Environmental Science and Technology](#)

5

A

[Master of Science in Materials Engineering](#)

5

A

[Master of Science in Sustainable Materials Engineering](#)

5

A

[Exchange Programme in Bioscience Engineering: Environmental Technology \(master's level\)](#)

5

A

Teaching languages

English

Keywords

risks and safety of chemicals, environmental toxicology, toxicology, ecotoxicology, toxicity, ecotoxicity tests, risk assessment of chemicals, dose-response evaluation, environmental pollution, human health, effects analysis, exposure analysis

Position of the course

The aim of this course is to introduce the students in the theoretical foundations of (eco)toxicology of chemicals and in the principles of exposure, effects and risk assessment of chemicals for ecosystems and humans. A strong focus is on understanding how different physical, chemical, biological and ecological processes contribute to chemicals exposure, effects and, ultimately, risk. Finally, the various aspects of the theory will be brought into practice by means of hands-on training into exposure and effects testing in the laboratory ('practicum') and quantitative (real-life) chemicals risk assessment ('PC exercises', 'case study').

Contents

LECTURES

1. General introduction

- Chemicals are everywhere... concerns, examples, risks
- The bigger picture: planetary boundaries, sustainable development goals
- The dawn of (eco)toxicology: the case of DDT and effects on bird populations
- What is (Eco)toxicology?
- Human vs. ecological risk assessment
- General scheme of risk assessment: hazard, exposure, effects and risks
- Risk assessment vs. risk management
- Overview of worldwide legislative and regulatory frameworks for chemicals (e.g., REACH, water framework directive)
- Risk characterisation

2. Environmental Exposure Assessment

- Emission: sources, scenarios, estimation
- Equilibrium partitioning: principles, examples
- Intra- vs. inter-media transport
- Inter-media transport: sedimentation, leaching (PMT substances), volatilisation
- Transformation of chemicals: general introduction and modeling
- Abiotic degradation: hydrolysis, photolysis
- Biodegradation: persistence, measurement, examples, application (PBT substances)
- External Exposure assessment: predicting concentrations in water, air, soil & sediment
- Internal Exposure assessment: bioconcentration, bioaccumulation, biomagnification; the case of PFOS

3. (Eco)toxicology at sub-organism level

- Hierarchical response scales to chemical stress
- Human toxicology and ecotoxicology integration
- Uptake, biotransformation, detoxification and elimination: metals and organic chemicals
- Molecular and cellular effects (oxidative stress, DNA damage, enzyme dysfunction, epigenetic effects)
- Adverse outcome pathways: framework, examples, development, regulatory significance

4. Ecotoxicology at organism and supra-organism levels and effect assessment

- Ecotoxicity testing: design, exposure systems, acute and chronic toxicity, data analysis, animal alternatives
- Effect assessment: PNEC derivation, Assessment Factors, Species Sensitivity Distribution
- Contaminants of emerging concern: examples
- Increasing ecological realism: bioavailability and temperature effects, mixture toxicity
- Increasing ecological realism: population, community, and ecosystem-level effects

5. Human toxicology and risk assessment

- Introduction, objectives, general framework
- Effects (hazard) assessment: toxicity testing (in vivo, in vitro), epidemiological & other data
- Exposure assessment: occupational, environmental & consumer exposure
- Risk characterisation: compares exposure with DNEL
- Risk management and communication

6. Guest lecture(s) on current topic(s) in environmental risk assessment and management

PRACTICUM (WETLAB)

- Biodegradation test
- Ecotoxicity test

PC EXERCISES (PCLAB)

- Biodegradation and dose-response data analysis
- Environmental exposure & effects assessment and risk characterisation

- Environmental Fate and Bioavailability
- Human exposure & effects assessment and risk characterisation

PC EXERCISES (CASE STUDY)

Students need to search environmental fate, exposure and effects data on a certain chemical, critically review and interpret the dataset & perform a risk assessment.

Initial competences

Bachelor of science level knowledge of mathematics, chemistry, biology, and ecology

Final competences

- 1 Understand physical, chemical, biological and ecological processes that determine exposure, effects and risks of chemical to man and the environment
- 2 Know how theoretical foundations of risk assessment are brought into practice in legislation
- 3 Apply quantitative techniques for dose-response, exposure, effect and risk evaluation
- 4 Interpret, critically analyze and report on scientific literature on (eco)toxicology and risk assessment

Conditions for credit contract

Access to this course unit via a credit contract is determined after successful competences assessment

Conditions for exam contract

This course unit cannot be taken via an exam contract

Teaching methods

Seminar, Lecture, Practical

Study material

Type: Syllabus

Name: Environmental Risk Assessment - Practicum
 Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty
 Optional: no
 Language : English
 Available through Student Association : No

Type: Slides

Name: Environmental Risk Assessment
 Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty
 Optional: no
 Language : English
 Available on Ufora : Yes
 Online Available : No
 Available in the Library : No
 Available through Student Association : No

Type: Audiovisual Material

Name: Environmental Risk Assessment
 Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty
 Optional: no
 Language : English
 Available on Ufora : Yes
 Online Available : No
 Available in the Library : No
 Available through Student Association : No
 Usability and Lifetime within the Course Unit : regularly
 Usability and Lifetime after the Study Programme : not

Type: Lab Material

Name: Environmental Risk Assessment
 Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty
 Optional: no

Available through Student Association : No
Usability and Lifetime within the Course Unit : one-time

References

van Leeuwen C.J., Vermeire T.G. (2007) Risk Assessment of Chemicals: An Introduction. Springer, 2nd edition, 688p; ISBN 978-1-4020-6101-1.

Course content-related study coaching

Lecturers and academic assistants can be consulted (after electronic appointment only) for additional guidance

Assessment moments

end-of-term assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the first examination period

Skills test, Written assessment with multiple-choice questions

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the second examination period

Skills test, Written assessment with multiple-choice questions

Examination methods in case of permanent assessment

Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment

examination during the second examination period is possible

Extra information on the examination methods

Period-aligned evaluation (during examination period):

- Theory: closed book exam with multiple choice questions focusing on a detailed and integrated understanding of the theoretical foundations of (eco)toxicology and risk assessment.
- Skills test: closed book exam; students will need to solve one or more 'integrated problems' for which integrated knowledge obtained during the lectures, practicals and PC exercises classes is required

Calculation of the examination mark

The calculation of the global examination mark will be as follows:

1. Theory: 50% of the total mark (10 points of the 20)
2. Skills test: 50% of the total mark (10 points of the 20)

Students who eschew period eschew participation in practicum, PC exercises, or case study may only be able to receive a global examination mark of 6/20.