

The ICPE face to environmental issues. From industrialo-environmental risk perception to its representation in a vulnerable environment: the case of coastal industrial areas in France

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According to a study by the Economist Intelligence Unit in 2008 [1] firms express difficulties to perceive and manage their impacts on environment. The increasing number of environmental accidents (Seveso in Italy, Erika and AZF in France, Ajka in Hungary, or recently, Fukushima) regularly reminds us how the environment is vulnerable to human activities. There are also less "visible" but no less devastating environmental damages. Industrial activities can also generate environmental risks and pollutions over the long term (air, soil, water, biodiversity and waste).

Many empirical studies, both in sociology, experimental psychology, anthropology or in psychometrics, are interested in the divergence between the objective assessments of experts and subjective assessments of laypeople. Experts and lay people are questioned about various types of risks (GMOs, nuclear, nanotechnology, mobile ...) for which they are not the source. But how do firms internally appreciate and manage the risks they generate on their natural and human environment? What are the relevant variables (organizational and external variables) which influence them? Facing growing pressures, firms must be aware of the impacts of their activities on the site of production and beyond. Indeed, in the recent context of "environmental awareness" from stakeholders and growing responsibility of firms to their environment (the 1st August 2008 Act on the corporate environ-

mental responsibility transposed from the Directive 2004/35/EC of the 21st April 2004), they have to manage environmental risks they generate under penalty of irreversible consequences for their sustainability (boycotts of products, financial impacts, lack of image, loss of markets etc.).

In France, about 500,000 sites are regulated according to their "risky" activity. These classified installations for environmental protection, also called "ICPE" [2], are often located on coastal industrial cities, near estuaries and deltas that are environmentally vulnerable areas (urbanization, pollutions and nuisances, development of industrial activities and tourism, etc.). They are near large French rivers. Indeed, the strong concentration of risky firms and the high population density in these areas justify our interest in strategies for prevention and management of environmental risks within firms.

References

[1] The Economist Intelligence Unit surveyed 320 executives around the world in March 2008 about their attitudes to environmental risk management. The survey was sponsored by ACE, KPMG, SAP and Towers Perrin. Under the Spotlight: the transition of environmental risk management, 2008.

[2] ICPE : Installations Classées pour la Protection de l'Environnement.

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