

Choosing new technology? Let your emotions speak

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Emotions tend to run high during debates on high-risk technologies such as nuclear energy, CO₂ storage and cervical cancer vaccines. Yet these emotions are seldom taken seriously when the decision is made whether or not to use the technology in question. This needs to change, feels professor in philosophy at TU Delft Sabine Roeser, "because it is

precisely our emotions that bring moral views to the surface which are important for responsible innovation."

On Friday 8 February 2013 Roeser will be giving her inaugural lecture as Antoni van Leeuwenhoek professor at TU Delft.

Hard hats

On 28 January a couple of hundred residents from the municipality of Loppersum in Groningen, some wearing hard hats, met with Minister Kamp of Economic Affairs. They were concerned, and some were angry, about the results of NAM research that show that [gas extraction](#) beneath their homes can lead to more [powerful earthquakes](#). Professor in philosophy at TU Delft Sabine Roeser conducts research into the moral aspects of high-risk technology. Her most important point: take emotions seriously! Roeser: "In order to reach the best moral solution for the situation in Loppersum, my advice to the minister is to not only take the rational cost-benefit analysis and financial aspect into account, but also to take the residents' emotions seriously."

Let emotions speak

In her inaugural lecture on Friday 8 February 2013, Roeser will argue that emotions are seldom allowed to play a constructive part in decision making concerning high-risk technology. In the debate on CO₂ storage beneath Barendrecht, the emotions of local residents were ignored and the debate focused only on the rational cost-benefit analysis and the statistically negligible risk of CO₂ leakage from the reservoir. On the other hand: a meaningful debate never got off the ground in Groningen because of 'lack of a broad support base'. Roeser: "This is a missed opportunity, because emotions bring moral viewpoints and ethical objections to the surface that are fundamentally important to responsible

innovation." A public outcry can be an indication of an unjust distribution of risks. Anger can reveal a violation of people's autonomy – are you giving people the right to participate in decisions about their environment that one would expect in a democracy? According to Roeser, emotions should be the starting point for every discussion on using high-risk technology: "Only then can you make well-considered decisions as a country."

This approach requires a different attitude of policy makers, experts and citizens. Roeser: "you must be prepared to listen to each other. At the end of the day it produces more morally robust decisions, and a better understanding between experts and laypeople."

Provided by Delft University of Technology

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