

Proceedings

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON REPORTING RELEASES OF TOXIC CHEMICALS

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Introduction

In 1991, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development jointly sponsored the International Conference on Reporting Releases of Toxic Chemicals to demonstrate the uses and applications of the Toxics Release Inventory, the United States' national database of toxic chemical releases to the environment. Held in Vienna, Austria, this conference brought together 104 delegates from western and central European nations, Australia, Canada, Japan, and the United States.

As a result of a major chemical accident at Bhopal, India, in 1984, and the commitment of public interest groups to assure that the public would be provided with information about chemicals in their communities, the U.S. Congress passed the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act (EPCRA) in November 1986. EPCRA has two main purposes: prepare communities for chemical emergencies that result from accidental releases and provide the public with information on chemicals stored on-site and on chemical releases to the environment.

The conference explored one facet of EPCRA, the requirement that manufacturing facilities provide the government with annual reports on their releases of toxic chemicals to the environment. This section of EPCRA, known as the Toxics Release Inventory (TRI), also requires that data be made available to the public. The pollutants covered under EPCRA have the potential of causing acute or chronic health effects and/or environmental hazards. Data collected for TRI include the types of toxic chemical releases; estimates of the amounts released into the air, water, and ground; estimates of the amounts of waste transported to other sites; and reports on how chemical wastes are treated on-site. Since 1987, the United States has required manufacturing facilities that meet certain criteria to submit annual reports on the specified toxic chemicals that their facilities routinely or accidentally release into the environment.

The Toxics Release Inventory allows the government, industry, and the public to estimate the annual emissions of certain chemicals in a specific geographic region. This information, in turn, gives organizations the ability to substantiate the need for further investigations and/or regulatory action, examine environmental risks at the national and local level, and influence the sources of industrial pollution.

The International Conference on Reporting Releases of Toxic Chemicals was designed to:

- demonstrate the usefulness of a TRI system,
- provide participants with the basic information necessary to build their own emissions database programs, and
- encourage the sharing of toxics release information between governments.

Structure of the Conference

The conference was geared toward environmental policymakers, technical staff (such as toxicologists and chemical engineers), risk assessment managers, information systems staff, and health professionals. A wide range of topics was covered, with a concentration on the analytical potential of the TRI, computer modelling capabilities, and implementation and programmatic uses.

The first plenary session described basic information about TRI and presented the Canadian, public interest, and industry perspective. The second plenary session presented information on the use and analysis of data as well as industry, news media, and public interest group initiatives generated by the TRI.

To facilitate smaller group discussions, three concurrent breakout sessions were held: Implementation and Program Issues of the U.S. Toxics Release Inventory; Information Manage-

ment; and Computer Tools for TRI Analysis. All of the breakout sessions were repeated three times during the conference, allowing the participants to attend each session. The breakout sessions included presentations and a question and answer period. In addition, there were ongoing demonstrations of how TRI data are made available through various sources, including computer programs used in analyzing toxics release data.

The conference concluded with a session on the implications of toxics release reporting for other countries. Representatives from four countries — The Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Czechoslovakia — and from two multinational organizations — the Or-

ganization for Economic Cooperation and Development and Friends of the Earth — served as panelists to provide a global perspective on TRI-like concepts.

Organization of this Document

The papers contained in this proceedings are given in the order in which they were presented at the conference. These papers are transcripts of the presentations. The issues, comments, and common themes raised during each of the three breakout sessions have been summarized by the moderator or a panel member.

**Toxics Release Inventory:
Environmental Information for
Government, Industry, and
The Community**