

Air Quality and the TRI

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ABSTRACT

The Office of Air Quality Planning and Standards, charged with implementing most stationary source regulations under the Clean Air Act, has used the Toxics Release Inventory for many purposes, most recently as a focal point for the debate over development of the list of 189 chemicals called for by the newly amended Clean Air Act. The staff have also employed the TRI to identify industry sectors that need additional regulation and guidance and to choose corporations to work with to voluntarily reduce emission levels. In the future, the staff will use these data to further develop office priorities.

Introduction

Chemical toxics. They can be found in improperly treated sewage wastewater, in stormwater runoff from farms and fertilized lawns, in emissions from chemical plants, and in automobile exhausts. No matter where it comes from, however, toxic pollution is a potentially deadly problem. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has always worked aggressively toward eliminating toxics in the United States; the Office of Toxics Substances' accomplishments with the Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) affirms the importance of our activities.

Once, toxic problems were believed to be confined to industrial areas, but current research proves that the threat of contamination is much more pervasive. The TRI has presented opportunities within EPA by providing a powerful tool; the Office of Air and Radiation has turned those opportunities into action. We've used the data to build a clear picture of the toxics of most concern in our nation and pinpoint the sources of those toxics.

Picture a jigsaw puzzle that depicts the total of all the air toxics emissions in the United States. Some of the pieces are large and easy to pick out, such as a chemical manufacturing facility; others, such as the misapplication of pesticides by a farmer, are small and harder to locate. It takes all the pieces to complete the puzzle, but the only way to do that is one piece at a time. The Toxics Release Inventory, which provides us with information on 300 individual chemicals in 20 chemical categories, adds many pieces to our air toxics puzzle.

In the United States in recent years, the importance of air toxics control has grown immensely in the eyes of the public. One reason is the accidental release of air toxics in Bhopal, India; another is the publication of the TRI data, which has attracted attention from government officials, industry, environmentalists, and the media. That attention has given EPA's air quality staff momentum and enabled use of the TRI information to target reductions in air emissions of hazardous air pollutants.