Toxics Release Inventory: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Releases Annual National Analysis

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03/07/2022

The United States Environmental Protection Agency ("EPA") released its 2020 Toxics Release Inventory ("TRI") National Analysis ("Analysis").

The TRI is a publicly available database that is prepared and published by EPA annually.

The Federal Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act ("EPCRA") was enacted in 1986. The federal statute requires certain facilities to submit reports each year on the amounts of toxic chemicals they release in the environment, either routinely or as a result of accidents. Federal legislation in 1990 extended reporting requirements to waste management and source reduction activities. EPA implements these laws and compiles information it receives in the TRI.

The TRI contains information on releases of over 800 chemicals and chemical categories from industries including manufacturing, metal and coal mining, electric utilities, and commercial hazardous waste treatment (among others). EPCRA requires companies that manufacture, process, or otherwise use specified toxic chemicals in amounts above reporting threshold levels to submit reports to EPA and to designated state officials.

Key points in the 2020 Analysis that EPA emphasizes include:

- Environmental releases of TRI chemicals by facilities covered by the program declined by 10% between 2019 and 2020
- More than 21,000 facilities report annually on the chemicals they release into the environment or otherwise manage as waste
- The 2020 Analysis includes enhancements that EPA states will make the data more useful and accessible to communities, including those with Environmental Justice concerns by:
- Adding demographic information to the "where you live" mapping tool
- Making it easy to overlay maps of facility locations with maps of overburdened and vulnerable communities
- Identifying potential exposures to air and water pollution so as to understand which communities are experiencing a disproportionate pollution burden
- A new map displaying international transfers of chemical waste by facilities in each state:
- Including information on the facility that shipped the waste
- Destination country
- How the waste was managed in that country

- Facilities reporting to the TRI are stated to have avoided releasing into the environment more than 89% of the chemical-containing waste it created and managed during 2020 through practices such as:
- Recycling
- Energy recovery
- Treatment
- The 2020 Analysis is the first to feature reporting on the 172 PFAS added to the TRI by the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act
- Since 2011 releases to the environment have decreased by 27%
- TRI facilities implemented 2,779 new source reduction activities in 2020

A link to the Analysis can be found here.