



# WORKING GROUP ON COMMUNITY RIGHT-TO-KNOW

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## THE TOXICS RELEASE INVENTORY

### *Right-to-know reporting for industrial toxic waste and pollution*

#### **A Landmark Law**

This fact sheet describes the Toxics Release Inventory provisions of the Emergency Planning and Community Right to Know Act of 1986 (EPCRA, or SARA Title III).

#### **The Toxics Release Inventory**

Certain industrial facilities that use any of some 600 chemicals in large amounts must annually disclose: toxic releases to air, land, and water (starting 1987); and toxic waste treated, burned, recycled, or disposed (starting 1991 under the Pollution Prevention Act of 1990). The U.S. EPA assembles this information into the first publicly accessible, on-line environmental database mandated by Federal law—the Toxics Release Inventory (TRI).

#### **Background**

TRI developed from three roots: a broad grassroots movement for right-to-know; the need for better information on why facilities generate toxic waste; and the December 1984 Bhopal tragedy. Chemical companies fought it, the Reagan Administration opposed it, and Congress hotly debated it—key provisions passed by only one vote in 1985.

TRI is now widely recognized as a valuable source of environmental information for the public, workers, legislators, the press, regulators, investors, and industry. Access to information is helping communities lead a nationwide movement to prevent toxic pollution.

#### **Some Limitations**

- Fewer than 1% of commercial chemicals are included in TRI (but many common industrial chemicals are included);
- Small firms and many non-manufacturers are exempt (e.g., large industrial dry cleaners, oil wells, sewage plants, medical waste incinerators);

- Facilities ordinarily estimate, rather than measure, releases;
- Some covered facilities fail to report as required;
- Firms are not required to examine prevention alternatives;
- Firms don't report workplace and community exposure levels;
- Chemicals in products (as opposed to wastes) are not reported;
- TRI data are insufficient to track pollution prevention.

#### **Improving Right-to-Know**

**U.S. EPA**—The agency has:

- Added 280 chemicals to the right-to-know list (starting 1995);
- Added seven non-manufacturing industries—metal mines, coal processors, waste disposal, solvent recyclers, oil- and coal-fired utilities, chemical wholesalers, and petroleum bulk storage (starting 1998);
- Considered worker exposure and chemical use reporting (unfinished).
- Set lower thresholds for reporting many persistent and bioaccumulative toxic chemicals (starting 2000)
- In addition, President Clinton ordered previously exempt Federal facilities to report (starting 1994).

**Congress**—Opponents have sought but failed to weaken TRI.

Supporters have sought to improve TRI by:

- including all relevant industries;
- adding worker exposure and chemical use reporting;
- lowering disclosure thresholds for highly toxic chemicals;
- tracking toxics in children's toys and consumer products;
- integrating TRI reporting with other environmental information.

#### **Other Important Provisions**

Under EPCRA, you can also find out what hazardous chemicals businesses are storing in your community; participate in local emergency planning; and enforce the law against facilities that fail to report as required.

## How to Get TRI Data – See [www.epa.gov/triexplorer](http://www.epa.gov/triexplorer) or [www.rtknet.org](http://www.rtknet.org)

#### **Useful Resources**

- The **Working Group on Community Right-to-Know**; (202) 234-8494, [www.crtk.org](http://www.crtk.org).
- The **Right-to-Know Network (RTK-NET)**; (202) 234-8494 or [www.rtknet.org](http://www.rtknet.org)
- *New Jersey Hazardous Substance Fact Sheets* provide detailed information on TRI chemicals; get from N.J. DOH at 609-984-2202 (first ten free) or from [www.state.nj.us/health/eoh/rtkweb/](http://www.state.nj.us/health/eoh/rtkweb/).
- EPA's **TRI Homepage**: <http://www.epa.gov/tri>.

- EPA's **EPCRA Hotline**: (800) 424-9346.
  - *TRI Reporting Form R and Instructions* explains reporting requirements;
  - *Common Synonyms* identifies TRI chemicals under various common names.
- EPA's **TRI User Support** line: (202) 566-0250 provides:
  - Assistance with TRI data searches;
  - TRI data to those without Internet access;
  - Help with interpreting TRI data.