

Environmental Tools:

Pollutant Release Inventories

What are pollutant release inventories?

Pollutant release inventories provide public access to environmental information collected and disclosed by companies. They are used to register and inventory sources of pollutant emissions and discharges – routine or accidental – from facilities and to track the status of environmental indicators such as air, land and water quality, and human health. Inventories may be mandatory, established through government regulation, or be voluntary initiatives, sponsored by private or non-governmental organizations. Mandatory inventories established through regulation only require reporting of information related to release of pollutants, and do not stipulate reductions.

Where are they used?

Participation in Pollutant Release Inventories is typically focused at large, regulated, point source emitters where monitoring and collection of emissions information already exists as part of permitting requirements.

National Pollutant Release Inventory (NRPI)

Established in 1992 under the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999*, the NRPI requires companies to report information on releases (and transfers of pollutants) on an annual basis. Environment Canada then provides the information to Canadians in an annual public report and maintains a detailed inventory that can be accessed and searched through an online database. The database contains information on annual releases to air, water, land and disposal or recycling from all sectors – industrial, government, commercial and others. Only facilities that meet established emissions criteria are required to report to the NRPI.

Canadian Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Reporting Program

This is an ongoing information disclosure program in which the federal, provincial and territorial governments are working in collaboration to develop a harmonized “one-window” domestic mandatory reporting system for GHG emissions. Accurate tracking of GHG emissions is an important part of assessing Canada's overall environmental performance. By providing a more precise picture of the sources and amounts of GHG emissions, mandatory reporting will contribute to the development, implementation and evaluation of climate change and energy use policies and strategies. Further, this program is designed to encourage timely and accurate reporting of GHG emissions, support public confidence in the transparency and integrity of domestic reporting and provide a consistent basis of reporting across jurisdictions, sectors and sources.

This system will be implemented in phases. During Phase One, which was announced in March 2004, data on GHG emissions are collected from facilities that emit 100 kilotonnes or more of CO₂ equivalent emissions. Regulated parties are required to report their facility's GHG emissions on June 1st of each year.

Statistics Canada, as the selected reporting vehicle, will jointly collect the information under the authority of the *Statistics Act*, as well as the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999*, and the *Climate Change and Emissions Management Act* (Alberta Government).

United States Toxic Release Inventory (TRI)

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Toxics Release Inventory is a database containing information on toxic chemical releases and other waste management activities reported annually by industry groups as well as federal facilities.

California Climate Action Registry

The California Climate Action Registry was established as a non-profit, voluntary registry for greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The Registry helps California organizations establish GHG emissions baselines, against which any future GHG emission reduction requirements may be applied. Participating organizations register their GHG emissions and are encouraged to report nationwide.

Tool performance:

Pros

- Motivates organizations to improve environmental protection to enhance public image.
- Can encourage consumers to boycott or avoid products from high polluters.
- Can discourage investment in companies with high emissions, which studies have shown can prompt those companies to reduce their emissions voluntarily.
- Pressures government enforcement agencies to scrutinize large polluters more carefully.
- Forces companies to collect, calculate and certify data, and report it to the public.
- Satisfies the public's "right to know" that they might be affected by third party pollution.
- Helps government and industries track progress in pollution prevention, evaluate releases and transfers of substances of concern, identify and take action on environmental priorities, and implement and track the effectiveness of policy initiatives and risk management measures.

Cons

- Accuracy may be compromised through poor internal calculation/reporting systems.
- Standardized methodologies may not be available to use for emissions estimations.
- May be costly and complex to develop and maintain.
- May have confidentiality concerns. Some organizations fear they may be releasing information that would be beneficial for industry competitors, or they may not want regulators to know they can do a better job of reducing emissions in order to avoid additional abatement costs.
- Can lead to public security issues. The United States determined that disclosure of certain corporate information to the public might lead to national security issues.

Special considerations:

The following criteria and principles used in the design and maintenance of Pollutant Release Inventories should be considered:

Relevance: Define boundaries that appropriately reflect the emissions of the business and the decision-making needs of users.

Completeness Account: State and justify all emissions sources and activities within the chosen organizational and operational boundaries.

Consistency: Allow meaningful comparison of emissions performance over time. Any changes to the basis of reporting should be clearly stated to enable continued comparison.

Transparency: Address all issues in a factual and coherent manner, based on a clear audit trail. Important assumptions should be disclosed, and appropriate references made to the calculation methodologies used.

Accuracy: Exercise due diligence to ensure emission calculations have the precision needed for their intended use and provide reasonable assurance of the integrity of reported emissions information.