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ALERT: EPA Proposes Rollback on Toxic Pollution Reporting

EPA recently announced plans that would essentially dismantle its Toxics Release Inventory (TRI), the nation's premier tool for notifying the public about toxic pollution. The TRI annually provides communities with details about the amount of toxic chemicals released into the surrounding air, land, and water. The information enables concerned groups and individuals to press companies to reduce their pollution, resulting in safer, healthier communities. Despite the program's widely hailed success, however, EPA is proposing to significantly rolling back the program's reporting requirements.

The EPA has proposed three changes, each of which would dramatically cut information available to the public on toxic pollution. The agency is proposing to:

- Move from the current annual reporting requirement to every other year reporting for all facilities, eliminating half of all TRI data;
- Allow companies to release ten times as much pollution before being required to report the details of how much toxic pollution was produced and where it went;
- Permit facilities to withhold information on low-level production of persistent bioaccumulative toxins (PBTs), including lead and mercury, which are dangerous even in very small quantities because they are toxic, persist in the environment, and build up in people's bodies.

These proposals are part of EPA efforts to reduce the amount of paperwork companies must file. In seeking to reduce the reporting burden on industry, however, EPA has been aggressively pursuing major changes to the TRI program with little consideration of the vital information communities will lose under these changes. Many public interest groups have asserted that the TRI program does not impose any excessive or unnecessary burden on companies.

Critics see little reason to interfere with a program that has worked so well. Many credit the TRI program with encouraging companies to massively reduce the production and release of toxic waste. Since the program began in 1988, disposals or releases of the original 299 chemicals tracked have dropped nearly 60 percent. Reductions have continued even as the list of TRI chemicals has grown. This year, EPA reported that the last five years of data show a 42 percent drop in the disposal and releases of the nearly 600 chemicals now tracked under the TRI program.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, government officials, citizens and other groups used TRI data to identify potential sources of toxic storm-related releases. Critics of the proposed rollbacks believe that the Gulf Coast emergency highlights the need for more -- not less -- reporting on toxic hazards. They assert that the more information collected by government on hazardous chemicals, the safer and more prepared to deal with potential disasters citizens and first responders will be.

EPA has tried to justify its proposal to eliminate every other year of reporting by claiming the agency would save \$2 million for each skipped year. The agency reasons that the saved money could be reinvested in the TRI program, thereby improving the quality and accuracy of the remaining information.

EPA is mandated by law to consider public input before making the significant changes proposed to the TRI program, and is accepting public comments for at least 60 days. Click [here](#) to submit comments and tell EPA to abandon its plans to rollback TRI reporting.

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