

Toxic Release Inventory: U.S. EPA Office of Inspector General Addresses Data Accuracy



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The United States Environmental Protection Agency (“EPA”) Office of Inspector General (“OIG”) released what it describes as a “Management Alert” titled:

Certain Toxic Release Inventory Data Disclosed to the Public Are Inaccurate

See Report #19-N-0015 (“Report”)

The Report originates from Charles J. Sheehan, OIG Acting Inspector General and is transmitted to Alexandra Dapolito Dunn, Assistant Administrator Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention.

The Report states that while OIG was conducting the Audit of the Impact of Toxic Release Inventory Late Reporters on the EPA’s Annual TRI National Analysis, OIG decided to issue an immediate Management Alert informing EPA of its discovery that Toxic Release Inventory (“TRI”) pertaining to releases to hazardous substances from Publicly Owned Treatment Works (“POTW”) are inaccurate. OIG states that this has resulted in the public not receiving complete and timely information about environmental conditions affecting human health.

The TRI is a publicly available database that contains information on toxic chemical releases and other waste management activities reported annually to EPA by certain covered industry groups as well as federal facilities. The TRI was established pursuant to the federal Emergency Planning and Community Right-To-Know Act of 1986 and subsequently expanded by the Pollution Prevention Act of 1990.

Facilities and certain industries which manufacture, process, or use significant amounts of toxic chemicals, are required to report on their releases of these chemicals on an annual basis.

As to the purpose of TRI’s public data systems, OIG notes in its Report that it is used to help:

... support informed decision-making by companies, government agencies, nongovernmental organizations and the public. According to EPA staff, the data are also used for research purposes by other worldwide TRI data users, such as other governments, academics and those researching health impacts.

OIG states that it analyzed data to determine the total number of TRI reporting facilities that may have reported releases late and the corresponding pounds of chemical releases reported late.

The Report states that in examining EPA’s public TRI release data and the impact of the data on the agency’s annual TRI National Analysis, discrepancies were identified between:

(1) the total pounds of chemicals released to the environment as reported in the publicly available TRI data for reporting years 2013–2017 and

(2) the information that the EPA provided to OIG separately on the total pounds of chemicals released.

As a result, OIG states that the identification of the discrepancies led to the EPA's discovery that total release calculations provided by the publicly available database do not properly include the POTW release amounts. The effect is stated to include:

. . . nearby communities or worldwide researchers, . . . will not always have accurate or consistent information regarding releases of the hazardous substances from POTWs that may significantly impact human health and the environment.

A copy of the Report can be found [here](#).