



Environmental Justice Implications of Reduced Reporting Requirements of the Toxics Release Inventory Burden Reduction Rule

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The Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) is a publicly available database that provides information about the use, storage, and release of hazardous chemicals by manufacturing and industrial facilities. Public disclosure of the TRI data allows citizens, researchers and regulators to assess health risks in different communities, and to advocate for improved environmental performance of industry. The TRI has been credited with a 49% reduction in chemical releases (1.59 billion pounds) since the program began in 1987. The cornerstone of the TRI is the annual report submitted by facilities which provides detailed information for every chemical released in excess of certain emission thresholds. In December 2006, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued the Toxics Release Inventory Burden Reduction Rule which exempts industrial facilities meeting certain higher reporting thresholds from filing detailed reports about the quantities of chemicals used, released, or managed as waste.

In contrast to EPA's findings, this study suggests that the TRI Burden Reduction Rule has environmental justice implications. We found that facilities that are eligible for reduced reporting are more likely to be located in neighborhoods where the proportion of minority and low income residents is significantly higher than neighborhoods hosting facilities that are still required to report detailed information.

Our spatial analytical approach examines the percent minority population, the percent minority population under age 5, and the percent of the population in poverty within a 1 km, 3 km, and 5 km buffer around each TRI facility in the U.S. We performed a national analysis, an analysis grouping states by EPA Region, and an analysis of each individual state. The biggest differences were found for percent minority and percent minority under age 5 compared to the percent of the population in poverty. For many states, a pronounced difference is apparent at the state level compared to EPA's national analysis. For example, the North Carolina population living within 1 km of TRI facilities that are required to report complete information to the TRI is 50 percent minority. By comparison, populations in proximity to North Carolina TRI facilities that can submit limited information, or are no longer required to report detailed information, are 56 percent and 65 percent minority, differences of 6 percent and 15 percent, respectively.

This analysis demonstrates that poor and minority communities stand to lose disproportionately more detailed information about chemical releases, leaving them less empowered to advocate for public health or environmental protections in their communities.

More information about this study, including EPA Region and state-specific fact sheets can be found at: <http://www.env.duke.edu/cehi/about/news/envjustice.htm>

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