



Environmental Institutions Seminar Series

Presents

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What Are We Measuring? Toxics Release Inventory Data and Facility Environmental Performance

Wednesday, March 2, 2005
12:30 pm –2:00 pm

Room A158 Levine Science Research Center, Research Drive, Duke University

Abstract

The Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) data are arguably the most comprehensive data available on facility-level releases of toxic chemicals and because of this, are frequently used for analysis by government agencies, non-profits, and academic researchers. Despite the frequent use of TRI data for policy analyses, there are several known concerns about the validity of these data as measures of environmental performance. This paper uses additional data from the Massachusetts Toxics Use Reduction Act (TURA) to examine the effect of reporting thresholds on policy-makers' ability to make cross-sectional and time-series inferences from the TRI data.

The results of the analysis suggest that the bias introduced by the reporting thresholds may be significant. Up to 40 percent of the observed decline in TRI releases in Massachusetts may be attributed to truncation at the reporting thresholds. In addition, quartile rankings of facilities based on reported releases may be in error 45 percent of the time when behavior around the reporting thresholds is not taken into account.

Biography

Benneer is a new faculty member in the Nicholas School. Her research assesses business responses to environmental regulations. She provides analyses that are essential to evaluating the success of new innovations in regulatory policy.

Benneer was an undergraduate at Occidental College, where she double majored in economics and environmental studies. She engaged in research focusing on environmental justice: the location of hazardous waste treatment storage and disposal facilities in Los Angeles County.

After a year of graduate studies at Yale, she took a job with a Cambridge, Mass. consulting firm doing economic analyses for the Environmental Protection Agency. She worked on regulations of lead-based paint removal, water discharges, and air emissions across a variety of industries.

She completed her Ph.D. in Public Policy at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government.



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