Quantifying Community Use of Pollutant Inventories

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Why have emission inventories?

- air dispersion modelling
- regional strategy development
- regulation setting
- air toxics risk assessment
- tracking trends in emissions over time
- community right-to-know

→ Reduction in emissions and impacts
Community Right-to-Know (CRTK)

- help local communities protect public health, safety, and the environment from chemical hazards

- access to adequate information on pollutants is fundamental for community involvement and action

- an informed community will act to bring pressure to bear on polluters and pollutant reductions will occur
Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs)

• a particular type of emissions inventory
• have been established in many countries
  – Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) – USA
  – National Pollutant Release Inventory (NPRI) – Canada
  – European Pollutant Emission Register (EPER) – Europe
  – National Pollutant Inventory (NPI) – Australia

• CRTK is the foremost priority for these inventories

Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that the community will access and use the information provided
Evidence for community use

- Scorecard, RTKNET, Working Group on CRTK, Friends of the Earth (UK) website
- “Working Notes” by Working Group on CRTK
- Other anecdotal evidence
Community modes of influence

(from Scorse 2005)

- Political pressure
- Green consumerism
- Future liability
- Future expansion
How can this reduce emissions?

(from Stephan 2002)

- Citizen participation is more likely when it is easier to access information
- Information may ‘shock’ the community
- Information may “shame” the company
- Helps focus on worst performers
- Negative media attention for poor performers
- Leads to policy setting – government concentrates on worst performers
What makes a community effective?

- Need to be able to access and understand the information
- Exceptional organisational skills
  - need defined goals and spokespersons
- High level of confidence
- Knowledge of government policy and legal processes
- Ability to establish a campaign and build media relationships

A need for well organised and informed community groups – not just individuals in a community
Australian community groups

- Pro-environment community groups more interested in “green” issues (nature conservation) rather than “brown” issues (toxics or pollution)
- Political culture which encourages green groups to focus on “green” rather than “brown”
- Some evidence that this is changing
Australian community attitudes

• High level of concern for the environment
• High level of concern for pollution issues but this appears to be dropping
• Most people feel that pollution is well controlled

For most people, pollution is not a visible or obvious issue
The Australian PRTR: National Pollutant Inventory

- Commenced in 1998 with 36 mandatory substances (90 in total)
- 1200 facilities reported in the first year (1998/1999)
- First data published on the Internet in January 2000
- Now full 90 substances are mandatory
- 3890 facilities reported for 2005/06 and this data was published on the Internet in January 2007

www.npi.gov.au
Community interest in the Australian NPI in 2001

- History of strong lobbying to create a PRTR
- Groups were disenchanted by the consultation process
- Perceived low level of interest by the public and by community groups
- Very limited publicity
Surveys of NPI awareness

- 2001 environment student survey found that 27% had heard of the NPI (33 respondents)
- 2002 telephone survey found 6% of people had heard of the NPI (582 respondents)
- 2006 telephone survey found 13% had heard of the NPI but less than 5% actually knew what it was (84 respondents)
Community Groups Survey 2001

Results
Community Groups Awareness

- Survey of 127 community groups in 2001
- 42 respondents (33%)
- 90% had heard of the NPI
- 48% had used the website
- 41.5 had been contacted by NPI staff
- 29% had attended an information session
If the National Pollutant Inventory revealed that a local company was legally releasing large quantities of pollution, which of the following actions would your organization most likely adopt?
Demonstrates a preference to contact the Commonwealth Minister at National Level.
Indicates a preference to contact the State Minister, State EPA or local council.
Indicates a preference for less public direct action.
Figure 15. Familiarity with NPI vs. Likely Lobbying of Government

No correlation: Groups familiar with NPI are not more likely to lobby government
Figure 16. Familiarity with NPI vs. Likely Direct Action Against the Polluter

No correlation: Groups familiar with NPI are not more likely to take direct action against the polluter.
Conclusions from 2001 Survey

• Level of awareness among environment groups is higher than for general population
• Actions tend to be directed to state and local government rather than direct action against the polluter
• More research is currently underway…
2007 Survey (in progress)

- 2000 households in Queensland, Australia
- 350 returned to date – follow-up in progress
- Questionnaire contained:
  - General questions about environmental attitudes
  - Questions about awareness of NPI
  - Questions about barriers to awareness
  - Questions about use (if they were aware)
  - Demographics
Preliminary results (307 respondents)

Awareness of NPI

- I have heard of a website that contains details about pollutant emissions from industry and other sources: 15%
- I have heard of the National Pollutant Inventory or NPI: 10%
- I have looked at the NPI summary report brochure: 5%
- Have you visited the NPI website?: 0%
Preliminary results (307 respondents)

Correct Identification

The NPI is a responsible care program established by Australian industry that uses a website to disclose possible pollutants in their products.

The NPI is a website, produced and maintained by environment groups, that reports on pollutant emissions from industry and other sources.

The NPI is a government program that collects information about pollutant emissions from industry and other sources for publishing on the Internet.

The NPI is a government program which sets the amount of pollution that Australian industry is allowed to emit to the environment.
Preliminary results (307 respondents)

Reasons for not visiting the NPI website

(a) I do not have access to the Internet
(b) I did not know about it
(c) I could not find the web page
(d) Low priority compared to other issues in my life
(e) I am not interested because pollution is well managed
(f) Pollution does not impact on me personally
(g) I don't care or I am not interested in pollution issues
(h) Pollution problems are exaggerated
(i) Pollution is beyond my control
(j) Someone else takes care of pollution
(k) I just haven't thought about it
(l) Don't know or not sure
(m) Other (Please specify)
What next?

• Hoping to get response rate up to 30%
• 200 community group members will be sent surveys which will combine the 2001 community group survey with the 2007 general survey
• Analysis should be complete by Dec 2007
Questions?