

To: National Pollutant Release Inventory, Environment and Climate Change Canada

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NPRI COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH

This paper relates to improving communication and outreach to the general public and other potential users of NPRI data to increase knowledge and capacity of ENGOs and other members of civil society.

The NPRI is an inventory about various pollutant releases and transfers to land, air and water in Canada. These data are meant to inform the work of scientists, government personnel, industry, academia, the ENGO community, and to be of use to the Canadian public in general. However, the data and information contained within the NPRI falls particularly short on accessibility and utility and usability by the general public. This calls for ECCC to place emphasis and focus on engaging the public and communities to raise awareness and utility of the NPRI program. Thus, it is important to expand the audience, focussing on people who would find the information available on the NPRI data useful and valuable, for example, for teachers, students, local community groups, and the media, people living downstream of polluters, and people in indigenous communities.

Some of the most common concerns that have been raised, particularly by ENGOs and some communities, regarding the website and using the database are as follows:

- the website is complex and even intimidating for many people;
- the website is difficult to navigate, even by seasoned users;
- the website is also difficult for users to cross-reference;
- it is difficult for members of local groups and individuals to easily find pollutant releases and transfers information for their communities;
- numerous tools (beyond the website exclusively) are needed to get the information contained on the NPRI circulating and usable by the public.

The development of a Citizen's Guide especially for the general public is an outstanding need. This could be a compendium to a website designed specifically for citizen's use. While the NPRI has developed a User's Guide, this does not replace the need for a Citizen's Guide.

Summaries of the data and findings by ECCC staff could be useful for broad distribution in public-friendly publications. In the early days of the NPRI Program, the media were briefed by ECCC and both national news media and local media outlets wrote articles and other news

items about the latest findings from updated NPRI data. It would be useful to explore how this can be done once again on a regular basis.

It is also important to identify what the barriers might be to the public having easy access to this rich and valuable information. Exploring other tools for reaching out to the general public is critical at this time. There is a definite need for holding training sessions for users, ENGOs and other civil society groups, First Nations, and society at large. Webinars, workshops and the like, geared to the various broader audiences are a good place to begin.

These tools can be on specific topics regarding the NPRI, its history and its usefulness in obtaining specific and general information on pollutants.

Creating dedicated staff time or adding an extra staff person to this project may be necessary to get the work accomplished.

These ideas and others should be explored about this important topic. One such idea could be to create a new, much simpler website especially for the general public that would allow them to find the release and transfer data for industries and other facilities in their area simply by entering and clicking directly to the name of a particular emitter. The current website could continue to be used by technical personnel and all others who can manage and interpret all of the more detailed and intricate charts, graphs, spread sheets and data bases.

With so many adverse issues facing many communities in Canada, it is important that communities be aware of the NPRI and that they know that they have access to information available on pollutants in their community. This makes it all the more important that the public have easy access to this information and that the public be made aware that NPRI even exists. ECCC needs to make a greater effort to reach and inform the public.

Given that there is an increased awareness and concern on environmental and health-related issues in Canada, it is timely that the government inform the public on the NPRI data and how it can be used.

Submitted by the NGO members of the NPRI Multi-Stakeholder Working Group