



National Pollutant Release Inventory Survey of Data Users 2019

Summary

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SUMMARY

Background and Objectives

The National Pollutant Release Inventory (NPRI) was established in 1992 to inform Canadians about pollutants in their communities and serves as a public inventory of releases, disposals, and transfers. Organizations in Canada, including manufacturers, mines, oil and gas operations, power plants, and sewage treatment plants are required to report to the NPRI. Governments, companies, organizations, researchers, and citizens are all potential users of NPRI data. A survey of data users seeks to understand the needs of users and satisfaction with the inventory, particularly given additions to the NPRI website that have taken place in the recent past to improve the users' ability to use and interpret the data.

Methodology

An online survey was conducted with 182 individuals who have used NPRI data and the website to gather information on their data needs and experiences with the inventory and website in order to make both easier to understand and navigate. The survey was conducted between mid-July and mid-August, 2019, from two sources: a client-supplied list of known data users and an open source link used with a general announcement about the survey on social media and the NPRI website on canada.ca. A series of 14 follow-up interviews were also conducted in the second half of August with some survey respondents to obtain more detailed information and context about use of the NPRI as well as sources of satisfaction and areas for improvement.

Key Findings

- Among the 182 respondents in the survey, just over one in three (36% or 58 individuals) reported that they had not used the NPRI.
 - Many of these are members of the general public, followed by municipal government or industry representatives.
 - The large majority agree the NPRI could be of benefit to them (89%), either professionally or personally. Barriers to use include a lack of understanding of what it contains, how to use it, or awareness that it can be accessed for personal use.
 - Supports of interest in beginning to use the Inventory are step-by-step guides (62%) and example study cases (52%), along with video tutorials (48%).
- Among the 64% of the sample who are NPRI users, almost all use it for professional purposes, to analyze sectors or historical trends, conduct environmental risk assessments or identify pollutant releases in specific areas, or to hold discussions with a facility (ranging from half to one in three, respectively).
- Most have been using the NPRI for more than five years and heard about the Inventory through the canada.ca website or directly from the Department. All but a handful access the tool through the NPRI canada.ca website.

- The most prevalent data products used are the query site (60%), the single year flat files (44%), and the raw, disaggregated data (36%) or the aggregated release data (32%). Both of the information products (NPRI Sector Overview and Data Highlights) are used by about half of users.
- Most users accessed the tool for specific facilities, pollutants, or years (74 to 77%). About half accessed the NPRI for data on specific locations, industry sectors, or release medium.
- About half said they also relied on the substance list by threshold category webpage (51%), the guide for reporting to the NPRI (48%), or the history of reporting requirements (45%), and 39% have used the webpage on using and interpreting data from the NPRI.
- Elements of satisfaction with the NPRI that are highest include support provided by staff (64% to 67%), as well as ease of understanding and interpreting the data and coverage of substances (57% to 58%). In all areas tested, between 11% and 24% of users indicated dissatisfaction. Quality control/assurance, and ease of locating files see the highest levels of dissatisfaction (24% and 20% respectively), followed by timeliness for release of data (19%).
- These results were echoed in follow-up interviews where accuracy and transparency of report (methods used to obtain numbers, concerns about lack of verification and about manual entry by emitters) was cited most often, along with concerns about the complexity of the system in terms of organization and use of technical language, along with lack of easy visualization tools, making it difficult for the general public and/or beginners to use.
- As with non-users, users also agreed step-by-step guides (63%) and study cases (53%) would be helpful support resources.
- Among the 138 NPRI users in the sample, 74 indicated they combine the data with other sources, including other environmental information (61%), health-related data (35%), and substance information (33%).
- Anticipated future use of the NPRI were most often predicted to be in areas related to sources of pollutants in particular/one's own community, levels of pollutants in ones' community, followed by use for academic purposes, or to track impacts of climate change over time.
- Generally, visualization of the data is what users indicated they would most like to see added in any expansion of the NPRI, including shape files (41%) and online visualization (38%). This was echoed in follow-up interviews among those suggesting greater capacity to visualize the data would make it more access to the general public.
- Three in four said they would be interested in updates about the NPRI in a range of areas (e.g., data publication, consultations on changes, upcoming workshops). For most, email is the most convenient way of obtaining these updates. These results also echo what was described in interviews as a desire for more information about what has changed, how and why, along with any details necessary when trying to make comparisons over time.