



DEC NEWS

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For Immediate Release

DEC Guide Puts EPA's TRI Report into Perspective for Alaska

June 23, 2004--Every year, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) releases for public review in each state a Toxics Release Inventory (TRI). According to Christina Colt, EPA's Region 10 TRI Coordinator, the total pounds of releases in Alaska during 2002 were greater than any other state.

To help understand the facts about what's actually been discharged into the air, land and water, DEC has prepared a guide to TRI for Alaskans (available online at www.state.ak.us/dec/index.htm). The guide explains that waste rock from mining is the reason Alaska's numbers are larger than other states and why releases in remote bush locations are greater than Alaska's more populated areas. Surprisingly, Alaska had the fewest facilities reporting releases, and the state's most populated and industrialized Southcentral region had a much smaller volume of releases (23.19 million pounds) than did the least populated area of the state in the Northwest Arctic region (481.58 million pounds).

More than 90% of the total pounds reported in 2002 were primarily waste rock containing minute levels of minerals like zinc and lead that are listed as TRI chemicals. Waste rock from the largest zinc mine in the world, Tech-Cominco's Red Dog Mine near Kotzebue, was the largest reported "release" in Alaska.

The waste rock from Alaska mines is well engineered, contained and regulated by state and federal agencies. While counted as "release" in the TRI, the waste rock from Alaska's mines is not polluting the air, land or water.

"TRI data alone cannot be used to quantify risk to public health and the environment," Colt said. "To determine the risk you must have site-specific information, know the material's toxicity, its persistence in the environment, and the amount and duration of human or environmental exposure."

Kurt Fredriksson, DEC deputy commissioner, agrees that the total pounds of “releases” do not reflect an accurate picture of Alaska’s environmental quality. “Alaska’s TRI releases are permitted discharges that are regulated under state and federal laws, based on site-specific information to ensure no harm to human health or the environment. Alaska’s environment is clean, healthy, and productive.”

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