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Press Release

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EPA Issues Toxics Release Inventory analysis for 2010 DEC TRI guide for Alaska available online

(Juneau, Alaska) The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has issued its annual national analysis of the 2010 "Toxics Release Inventory" (TRI). The inventory compiles the total reported weight of certain chemical substances that are emitted or discharged in accordance with permits, managed in regulated disposal facilities, or released to the environment accidentally.

"We recognize that TRI data provides important information to Alaskans about wastes being generated or discharged in our state. It is also important, however, to understand that the majority of Alaska's releases are a result of permitted activities at engineered facilities designed to protect human health and the environment," said Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Commissioner Larry Hartig.

In 2010 as in years past, Alaska had more of these chemical substances reported by industry than any other state in the nation. Alaska's ranking is due primarily to the permitted disposal of mine waste rock and tailings.

Total TRI releases for mining facilities, made up primarily of waste rock and tailings, account for more than 99% of the total pounds reported for all facilities in 2010. Waste rock contains metals, such as lead, in concentrations that are too low to process economically, but could cause health or environmental damage if released in an uncontrolled manner on land, in water or air. Handling and disposal of waste rock is subject to strict regulation in Alaska because of the potential for adverse effects.

The large releases reported annually by metal mines in Alaska, including those for 2010, are due to the reporting of minerals listed as TRI chemicals – primarily zinc and lead – remaining in waste rock. In general, the more rock a mine processes, the more zinc and lead-containing waste is reported. As in previous years, 2010 data indicate that metals in waste rock from four major mining facilities account for, by weight, the largest TRI releases in Alaska. Electric utilities, military bases, and refineries account for secondary releases of TRI chemicals. DEC produces an annual guide to put TRI data into perspective for Alaskans: www.dec.state.ak.us/spar/perp/tri/tri.htm

TRI data describes the amount of chemicals released, but it does not measure exposure, so it is an indicator of potential hazard rather than risk. The data is used as a starting point for evaluating exposure and risk in screening tools such as the Risk Screening Environmental Indicator found at: <http://www.epa.gov/oppt/rsei/>. The tool can assist users to better understand hazard, relative risk, and potential exposures. For questions about the TRI data, contact Gabriela Carvalho, EPA TRI Program Coordinator, 206-553-4016, carvalho.gabriela@epa.gov or Tony Brown, EPA Public Affairs, 206-553-1203, brown.anthony@epa.gov.