



International PRTR Coordinating Group

Fifteenth meeting

Wednesday, 25 January 2023, Paris (hybrid)

REPORT¹

1. The meeting of the International Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers Coordinating Group (ICG) was attended by representatives of the following countries and organizations: Brazil, Canada, Columbia, Croatia, Czechia, European Union, Finland, France, Italy, Japan, Lithuania, Republic of Korea, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), Commission for Environmental Cooperation, European Environment Agency, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), European Environmental Bureau, Guta Environmental Law Association, National Institute for Environmental Studies, Eastern Research Group and EX Research Institute Limited. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Iñigo de Vicente-Mingarro (Spain) and serviced by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

I. Opening and adoption of the agenda

2. The Chair opened the meeting with an introduction to the work of ICG and presented the provisional agenda.² The agenda was then adopted by the participants.

II. Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTR)-related activities

A. PRTR-global-map

3. The Chair presented the current version of the PRTR-global-map and informed about possible options concerning criteria for the colour coding for PRTR activities displayed on the map. A second version of the map also displayed information on countries' international PRTR-related commitments, such as through adherence to the Protocol on PRTRs,³ OECD membership,⁴ as well as being a Party to the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters⁵ or the Escazu Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean.⁶

4. During the ensuing discussion participants highlighted the importance of using for the map the most reliable information available, and that was referring to implementation of PRTR related standards

¹ This document was not formally edited.

² Available at <https://unece.org/environment-policy/public-participation/international-prtr-coordinating-group>.

³ See <https://unece.org/env/pp/protocol-on-prtrs-introduction>.

⁴ See <https://www.oecd.org/chemicalsafety/pollutant-release-transfer-register/introductionto-pollutant-release-and-transfer-registers.htm>.

⁵ See <https://unece.org/environment-policy/public-participation/aarhus-convention/introduction>.

⁶ See <https://www.cepal.org/en/escazuagreement>.

and international commitments. The usefulness of a PRTR map for global promotion of PRTRs as an important tool for providing access to environmental information was also emphasized, including for promoting PRTRs in other international fora and processes, such as the International Conference on Chemical Management and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management.⁷ The representative of OECD informed the Group that results of a survey on the implementation of the OECD Recommendation on Establishing and Implementing Pollutants Release and Transfer Registers would soon become available and could inform both the discussion on setting more discrete criteria for the current colour codes and indicators for the different degrees of PRTR development and the up-date of the map prior to the Group's next meeting. The Chair then concluded the discussion by inviting participants to submit any relevant up-dates to the secretariat.

B. Tour de Table on activities

5. Participants shared information on ongoing and planned PRTR-related activities. The discussion focused on the following subjects:

- Improving the user friendliness of PRTR portals, including both, by exploring how to better meet stakeholders' needs in the future, and the needs of those who report to PRTR databases;
- Improving the integration of PRTR into wider environmental information platforms;
- Using PRTR data for different user groups;
- Benchmarking environmental performance and pollution prevention;
- Increasing data comparability, including across PRTR systems in different countries and regions on transfers of waste;
- Conducting capacity-building activities, such as webinars and multi-stakeholder workshops on uses of PRTR data for economic, health and pollution prevention methods, etc;
- Developing and procuring PRTR software;
- Developing and exchanging on issues related to aquaculture, waste, wastewater treatment plants, including sludge from the treatment;
- Data integration such as for calculating externalities of the cost of industrial air pollution;

6. Participants shared information on providing support to the following countries on PRTR related activities: Albania, Argentina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Columbia, Costa Rica, China, Ghana, Indonesia, Madagascar, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Tanzania, Ukraine, Viet Nam and Zambia.

7. UNITAR presented an initial proposal on a "PRTR Partnership" which was prepared together with OECD and in consultation with UNECE, and invited the participants to express their interest in participating in this initiative. It was suggested that UNITAR and OECD could convene first consultations with interested parties where further details regarding the Partnership could be discussed (date will be announced in due course).

III. PRTR HOT-TOPICS

8. The Group then discussed several "hot-topics" that received a priority in the implementation of PRTRs:

(a) Collection, comparability and management of PRTR data, including with regard to the scope of PRTRs in the context of new developments linked to the use of chemical substances; further harmonization of different PRTR systems and issues of data equivalence;

⁷ See <https://www.saicm.org/About/ICCM/tabid/5521/language/en-US/Default.aspx> and <https://www.saicm.org/> respectively.

(b) Dissemination of available PRTR data, including good practices for a successful awareness campaign and for interactive data visualization options for communicating/presenting PRTR information;

(c) Using PRTRs for issues related to environmental justice.

9. A representative of the United States of America presented on how the Toxics Release Inventory Program was acting on pursuing environmental justice.⁸ The United States Environmental Protection Agency defines environmental justice as the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of the population group and with respect to respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. While the Toxics Release Inventory Programme covered legal economic activities, the pollutants released may still be a burden to the neighbourhood. The data on pollutant releases was therefore used to better identify issues and prioritize action. For example, this included choosing specific pollution prevention emphasize areas and the pollution prevention grant programme.

10. A representative of Commission for Environmental Cooperation⁹ then presented their work on how PRTRs support pollution prevention initiatives, including in relation to the development and application of best available techniques. A key benefit from making data available through PRTRs was indeed to enable making better decisions on pollution prevention. It was also important to actively take the data and bring it to those who can address issues of pollutant releases. The Commission for Environmental Cooperation was making more comparable release and transfer data gathered from Canada, Mexico and the United States of America. It also prepared topic-specific reports in order to support data users to identify challenges and pollution prevention solutions. He then mentioned ongoing work by the Commission for Environmental Cooperation with a focus on disposal and recovery operations and the international transfer of waste. PRTRs can for example provide the possibility to search waste transfer data by source and by recipient facility. The representative concluded by informing the group that it was also planned to include green house gas release data to the Commission's data set in the near future.

11. In the following discussion, the group noted the challenges related to limitations in the reporting on recovery and disposal operations. For instance, it was difficult to compare data on underground injection of pollutants between PRTRs as there was no common definition: in some PRTRs the operation was reported as disposal, while others recorded the same action as a treatment.

12. It was also noted that work on environmental justice topics resulted in an increased traffic on the corresponding webpages. In the United States, outreach workshops in communities had been reinstated (they had been dispended in 2016) as part of the work on the environmental justice issues. Other tools to engage with local communities existed, including other programmes of the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Toxic Release Inventory was one component in the greater institutional effort to engage better with vulnerable communities.

IV. Election of officers

13. Pursuant to the Group's decision taken at its fourteenth meeting (Paris, 26 January 2022) to elect a second Vice-Chair at its fifteenth meeting, bearing in mind the diverse geographic representation of the officers of the Group, the Group elected Mr. D errick Poirier (Canada) as Vice-Chair of the Group. The elected Vice-Chair highlighted the dynamically changing PRTR landscape and Canada's willingness to address adequately such development.

⁸ See <https://www.epa.gov/toxics-release-inventory-tri-program> and <https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice>.

⁹ See <http://www.cec.org/pollutants/tracking-pollutant-releases-and-transfers-in-north-america/> and <http://www.cec.org/tsreports/>.

V. Calendar of meetings

14. The Group took note of the information provided by the secretariat that a Global Round Table is tentatively planned for 2024 and the next meeting of ICG would be organized considering preparations for the seventh meeting of the Working Party on PRTRs under OECD tentatively planned to take place in January 2023.

VI. Key outcomes

15. The participants reiterated their commitment to coordination and synergies in relation to the work on PRTRs. In the context of the topic of the PRTR global map, the Group requested the Chair with the support of the secretariat to prepare a new version of the map for the next meeting, integrating comments made by participants.

16. The participants also took note of the above-mentioned proposal on the “PRTR Partnership” and agreed to confirm to the secretariat their possible interest to participate in this initiative by 28 February 2023.

17. Furthermore, the participants welcomed good practices and innovative approaches shared by the United States of America, the Commission for Environmental Cooperation and United Nations Development Programme, and by other participants during the *tour de table* and “hot-topic” sessions. The participants requested the secretariat to liaise with the potential speakers on PRTR related topics for the next meeting.

18. Finally, the Group elected Mr. D errick Poirier (Canada), the Group’s second Vice-Chair.
