

The Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers

The Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers is the first legally binding international agreement on pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTRs). Since its entry into force in 2009, the PRTR Protocol offers a solid legal framework for enhancing public access to information and for pursuing international cooperation on PRTRs.

PRTRs advancing sustainability, environmental governance and a green economy

Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development states, inter alia, that at the national level, each individual shall have “appropriate access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities, including information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities”, and that States shall “facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available”.

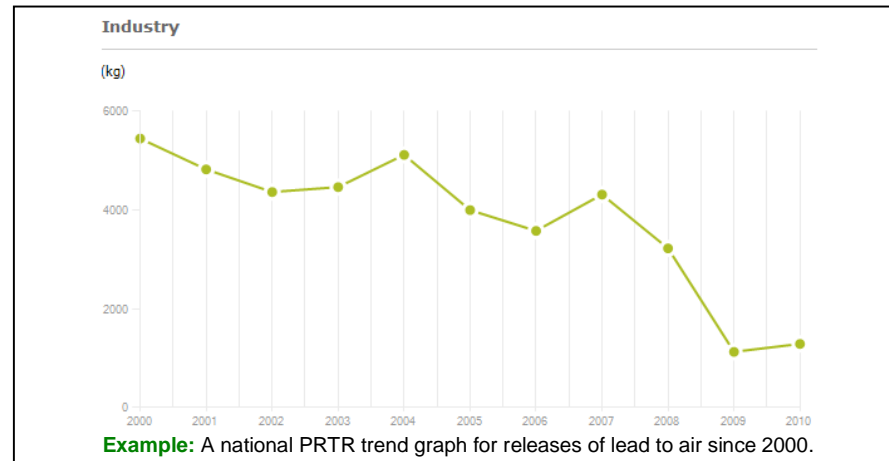
What is a PRTR? A PRTR is a publicly accessible database (register) providing periodic and reliable data on emissions (releases) and transfers of pollutants, including greenhouse gases (GHGs), heavy metals and toxic chemical compounds.

PRTRs could provide policymakers with key indicators for measuring progress in reducing pollutants, advancing sustainability and the success of a green economy. Governments, academia, research institutions, the public, and businesses driving eco-innovation can utilize the PRTR as a common indicator to inform their strategic goals. The PRTR Protocol facilitates and requires development towards compatible PRTR systems in different countries.

The current global environmental situation. Releases of GHGs are causing climate change and eco-toxic releases are significantly impacting the environment and human health with far-reaching consequences for the sustainability of life. The volume of releases of pollutants is currently much greater than the Earth's capacity to absorb those pollutants.



The existence of a PRTR can serve as a major driving force for pollution reduction throughout many sectors of the economy. In fact, dissemination of PRTR data has led to competition among generators of hazardous chemicals and/or pollutants to reduce their releases. After all, no one wants to be perceived by the general public as a wilful spoiler of the environment or contributor to possible adverse health effects.



The future. Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs recognize that the objectives of an integrated approach to minimizing pollution and the amount of waste resulting from the operation of industrial installations and other sources are to achieve a high level of protection for the environment as a whole, to move towards sustainable and environmentally sound development and to protect the health of present and future generations.





PRTRs benefit Governments,

Industry,

Citizens

and the Earth upon which we all rely



PRTRs benefit Governments by enabling Governments:

- to review the compliance of local facilities with their permit conditions;
 - to track the release of hazardous chemical substances and pollution trends over time;
 - to examine progress in reducing emissions;
 - to monitor compliance and national progress with international commitments;
 - to set priorities for reducing or even eliminating the most potentially damaging releases;
 - to identify priority industrial sectors for eco-innovation;
 - to use PRTR results as one input for assessing risks to human health and the environment;
 - and to help achieve pollution prevention, lessening the burden of control regulations, which require a large bureaucracy to monitor and enforce.
- PRTRs also reduce costs to Government and industry by providing a coordinated reporting system.

Cooperating internationally to promote PRTRs.

Broad international cooperation is an important element for the Protocol's implementation, including through sharing information and providing technical assistance.

PRTRs benefit industry and eco-innovation. PRTRs benefit both management and workers, through stimulating improved environmental management. For facilities, the exercise of monitoring or estimating pollution levels, as well as their mandatory publication, can encourage efforts to improve efficiency and reduce pollution levels and associated costs. **The existence of a PRTR can serve as a major driving force for pollution reduction and eco-innovation throughout many sectors of the economy**

PRTRs serve the general public, citizens' organizations, researchers and academics by providing access to information on local, regional or national pollution. PRTR data is accessible via the Internet and searchable according to individual facility, owner/operator, type of pollutant and type of activity and environmental medium (air, water, land)

PRTRs address climate change. PRTRs can help countries meet the objectives of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change treaty since where GHG emissions data are directly incorporated into a national register, the data can be used to supplement information needed to calculate the national GHG inventory.

The Protocol requires each Party to establish a PRTR which is:

- publicly accessible through the Internet;
- free of charge;
- searchable according to separate parameters (facility, pollutant, location, medium);
- covers releases and transfers of at least 86 pollutants covered by the Protocol, including GHGs, acid rain pollutants, ozone-depleting substances, heavy metals, pesticides, polychlorinated biphenyls (i.e., PCBs), volatile organic compounds (i.e., compounds that can easily evaporate in room temperature conditions, such as formaldehyde) and dioxins;
- Accommodates available data on releases from diffuse sources; has limited confidentiality provisions; and allows for public participation in its development and modification.

Open to accession by States throughout the world, the Protocol and its parent instrument, the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention), have established a new benchmark in promoting transparency and accountability in the sphere of the environment. Since the adoption of the Protocol in 2003 to date there are 28 Parties to the Protocol. Countries that already have implemented national PRTR registers or pollution inventories are encouraged to ratify the PRTR Protocol.

For further information: www.unece.org/env/pp/welcome.html
Aarhus Convention secretariat: public.participation@unece.org; +41 22 917 2376