



**For Immediate Release**

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## **Establishing a Pollutant Release and Transfer Register is Critical for China's Hazardous Chemicals Management**

The Institute of Public & Environmental Affairs (IPE) and the International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN) jointly released the report, “PRTR: Establishing a Pollutant Release and Transfer Register in China” on May 8, 2018 in Beijing, China. The two organizations also convened a forum with representatives from academia, business and environmental groups to discuss using a PRTR disclosure system to strengthen the management of hazardous chemicals.

Approximately 100,000 chemicals are used in the world today. China is the world's largest chemical manufacturer and user, and chemical production is predicted to grow 66% from 2012 to 2020, as compared to much lower growth rates in North America and Western Europe. While chemicals can contribute to economic development and improved living standards, they also pose adverse impacts on the environment and human health – especially during manufacturing and production processes. A recent string of incidents involving hidden wastewater discharge, illegal landfills and cross-border dumping of hazardous waste once again highlights the shortcomings of China's current management and control of hazardous chemicals.

Pollutant release and transfer register (PRTR) systems are environmental databases or inventories of potentially hazardous chemical substances and/or pollutants released to air, water and soil and transferred off-site for treatment or disposal. Around the world, PRTR systems play a crucial role in environmental governance by requiring polluters to be transparent and accountable toward end-of-pipe pollution discharge, safeguarding the public's environmental right to know, and enabling media and civil society to participate in governance.

“PRTR: Establishing a Pollutant Release and Transfer Register in China” looks into the background and process of industrialized nations' establishment of PRTR systems, as well as the key role they play in controlling and managing hazardous chemicals. In the US, which established the first PRTR system in the form of its Toxics Release Inventory (TRI), after ten years of disclosure, emissions of 340 chemicals reported on the TRI had dropped by 45.5 percent.

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The report also introduces relevant multilateral initiatives, including the PRTR Protocol to the Aarhus Convention and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM).

The report shows that although China has made historical progress toward establishing a legislative basis for environmental information transparency, it continues to focus on conventional pollutants in its efforts to leverage information disclosure as a means of pollution control, and has yet to extend such efforts to persistent, bioaccumulative pollutants such as hazardous chemicals and toxic heavy metals. Only with the Measures on the Environmental Management and Registration of Hazardous Chemicals (Trial), which went into effect in 2013, did China begin to make requirements for enterprises to disclose information on the release and transfer of hazardous chemicals. However, since the main focus of management was more on general pollutants, the Measures – which were China’s only piece of legislation with any form of a PRTR system – were never seriously implemented before they were annulled in July 2016.

In recent years, chemical pollution issues have received more attention. China’s 13<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan for Eco-Environmental Protection set “strengthening risk control in heavy metals, hazardous waste, and toxic and hazardous chemicals” as one of four key tasks. 2015 amendments to China’s Environmental Protection Law and the issuance of the accompanying Measures on Environmental Information Disclosure for Enterprises and Public Institutions require public disclosure of the “discharge concentration and volume” of characteristic pollutants. Amendments to China’s Water Pollution Prevention and Control Law that went into effect in 2018 also clearly stipulate for enterprises to “disclose information on toxic and hazardous water pollutants.” According to IPE’s research, at present, some key pollution-discharging entities are disclosing information about their characteristic pollutants and hazardous waste discharge, but comprehensive, complete public disclosure of release and transfer data on toxic and hazardous substances is not yet the norm.

The report introduces voluntary disclosure efforts undertaken by local departments and NGOs under the current lack of relevant legislation. In 2013, IPE developed a system for voluntarily reporting and disclosing PRTR information and began advocating for companies to disclose annual PRTR data for their suppliers in China.

According to an introduction by IPE Green Choice Outreach Director Kate Logan, Dell, Apple, Foxconn and other multinationals from the electronics industry have already incorporated

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information disclosure into their supply chain management mechanisms, requiring raw materials and other high environmental impact suppliers to report and publish their annual PRTR data. Apart from the electronics industry, Adidas and other textile brands have also actively motivated PRTR data reporting and disclosure.

The report recommends to learn from the best practices of international experience and mechanisms developed in China, and to leverage strong legislation as support for establishing China's PRTR system. It recommends for government to add PRTR to the legislative agenda as soon as possible; for different subsets of the public to pay attention to the construction of a PRTR system; and especially for major international and domestic brands, as well as financial institutions, to adopt green procurement and green finance as means of promoting the implementation of relevant disclosure requirements in China's Environmental Protection Law and the Water Pollution Prevention and Control Law.

Dr. Joe DiGangi, Senior Science and Technical Advisor at IPEN – which has long been a participant in multilateral initiatives on hazardous chemicals – said, “More than 100 countries have agreed that hazardous chemicals in electronics is an issue of global concern under the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) and formulating and implementing PRTR is a key recommendation. IPE's advancement of PRTR supports SAICM implementation and sets the stage for a comprehensive mandatory system that requires polluters to be accountable.”

IPE director Ma Jun believes that establishing a PRTR disclosure mechanism will provide a strong impetus for improving the control of hazardous chemicals in China. “According to international experience, PRTR systems not only allow media, environmental groups and the public to use disclosed information to pressure heavy polluting enterprises to reduce emissions; they also help the government more comprehensively and accurately grasp the state of corporate release and transfer of hazardous chemicals. Compared with traditional means of issuing more stringent standards, PRTR systems give companies the autonomy to voluntarily reduce their own emissions, allowing them to find more innovative, cost-effective solutions to achieve greater reductions of harmful substances with greater efficiency.”

At the release conference, Lvse Jiangnan founder Fang Yingjun and China Zero Waste Alliance founder Dr. Mao Da both shared introductions to their findings from on-site investigations of hazardous chemicals pollution issues. NRDC Senior Attorney Wu Qi introduced the legal



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foundation and process for information disclosure and PRTR. IT brand Dell shared its best practices of how it uses IPE's PRTR system to motivate suppliers to disclose data, as well as Dell's successful use of data to comply with new U.S. procurement standards.

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[IPE](#) is a non-profit environmental research organization dedicated to collecting, collating and analyzing government and corporate environmental information to build a database of environmental information.

[IPEN](#) is a public interest network of more than 500 NGOs in 125 countries working for a toxics-free future.

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