

## Commission for Environmental Cooperation

### Meeting of Power Users to Promote the *Taking Stock* Report and Website

August 30, 2006

#### Meeting Summary

**Participants:** see Appendix A.

**Meeting facilitated by:** Keith Chanon, Program Manager, CEC's Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (PRTR) Project and Danielle Vallée, Consultant, PRTR Project

#### Objectives of the meeting

- To review the purpose of *Taking Stock* and its added value
- To further identify *Taking Stock's* target users
- To review the *Taking Stock* report and website and assess needs and opportunities for presenting PRTR information (enhancing the website while reducing the length of the report)
- To identify next steps and develop timelines for short-term and long-term implementation phases.

#### Scope and limitations of the discussion

The meeting included three main segments:

1. A presentation and discussion of identified areas of added value of *Taking Stock*, and a presentation of identified user needs
2. A break-out session (2 groups) to discuss the results of a pre-meeting survey of participants (user needs) and determine the priority information topics and presentation options for *Taking Stock*
3. Continuation and wrap-up of the priority-setting discussion (as one group).

We had hoped to identify and rank priority information topics for *Taking Stock*, and to discuss in some depth the ways in which these topics could be presented on the website. We succeeded in identifying priority topics, although not in a particular order. There was also minimal discussion of issues relating to information management and technical website considerations.

#### General Conclusions

Some issues remained inadequately explored, due to time constraints and the breadth of the *Taking Stock* report, as well as the many issues about which the participants were asked to give opinions. However, we were able to validate *Taking Stock's* added value and explore ways in which different users use the information in *Taking Stock*.

We also succeeded in identifying certain priority topics – information that users consider to be important content for *Taking Stock*. This process allowed us to see, for example, that special feature topics are considered by all to be an essential component of the report. In addition, we gained input from participants about principal users of the report and how they use it.

Among the general conclusions that came out of the meeting, there was consensus about the need to shorten the printed *Taking Stock* report, in parallel with expanding data access and providing more information on *Taking Stock Online*; providing more context to the PRTR data; providing additional analysis (e.g., cross-border transfers), and highlighting significant changes as a way for users to better understand the evolving industrial pollution situation. Details of the recommendations and comments provided by participants can be found in the Table of Priority Information Topics included in this summary.

While we were not able to comprehensively address all questions (in particular those involving the tools and methods for presenting *Taking Stock* on the website), some of these issues were raised during the meeting; it is our intention to address them more fully through ongoing dialogue with participants.

### **Added Value of *Taking Stock***

Five areas were presented for review by meeting participants. The ways in which *Taking Stock* can provide added value include the following:

1. Providing a North American picture of industrial releases and transfers of toxic chemicals, including trends, sector analyses, special issues, and chemicals
2. Promoting increased PRTR data comparability among the 3 countries, such as: chemical lists; industries reporting to PRTRs; thresholds; reporting protocols
3. Raising awareness of key health and environmental issues relating to toxic chemicals and industry in North America:
  - a. providing information on the impacts of toxics on health and the environment
  - b. prioritizing chemicals via use of toxicity weightings
4. Increasing dialogue and collaboration:
  - a. across borders and industry sectors
  - b. promoting improved data quality
5. Integrating PRTR data into an overarching framework for managing chemicals in North America:
  - a. increasing collaboration with other CEC projects (e.g., State of the Environment report, Sound Management of Chemicals) and government programs
  - b. mapping PRTR data with other layers (e.g., bioregions, community health information).

Comments about *Taking Stock's* value-added, received through the pre-meeting survey of participants (Appendix B), were reviewed during the meeting. There was almost unanimous approval of these five items, thereby validating them as the main areas for focus. Additional comments are provided here:

#### Providing a N.A. picture of industrial releases and transfers of toxic chemicals

A comment from the pre-meeting survey stresses that the data in *Taking Stock* should be of high quality. Comments made during the meeting include:

- It should be the responsibility of the three governments to ensure and promote the quality of reported data
- CEC should play a facilitator role by addressing quality and comparability issues across the three countries
- Canada (NPRI) and the U.S. (TRI) have undertaken efforts to identify “non-responder” facilities (facilities that should report, but do not)
- Semarnat will be undertaking efforts to increase the number of facilities reporting. The question was asked: How can Canada and the U.S. help Mexico to encourage facilities to report?
  - One of the NGOs present remarked that in the past, he had requested companies with activities in all three countries to voluntarily report – but this had not achieved results
  - Each industry sector has a responsibility for its data, and some are already involved in voluntary initiatives (e.g., World Business Council on Sustainable Development)
  - It was pointed out that a company won’t report if its competitor does not need to; therefore, Mexico should put in place compliance enforcement regulations
  - Efforts could focus on multinational corporations so that their companies in Mexico follow practices being used in Canada and the U.S.

#### Raising awareness of health and environmental issues relating to toxic chemicals

Comments made during the meeting include:

- Having information (perhaps a “status report”) on existing international conventions and efforts relating to priority chemicals would facilitate understanding of the potential impacts of toxic chemicals
- People should also be aware of the regulations that apply to industry in relation to certain substances
- The CEC should play a facilitating role, by relating PRTR data to environmental issues (e.g., acid rain).

#### Integrating PRTR data into an overarching framework for managing chemicals in N.A.

The question arose about whether only the matched data set, or all PRTR data, should be mapped using the North American Atlas. Comments include:

- The presentation of only matched data would not be very useful (better to see all of the chemicals in North America)
- On the other hand, the problem with mapping all chemicals is that it would be visually misleading, since the three countries don’t all have the same chemicals in their databases.

#### **Taking Stock’s Target Users**

The following “universe” of users was presented to participants for their feedback:

- Government (it was suggested we include all levels)
- Academics
- NGOs
- Industry
- Citizens (it was suggested we use the term “individuals,” which is more inclusive)
- Media

Comments from participants include:

The CEC should add “International Community” to the list of users, since *Taking Stock* tries to raise awareness globally – we can work in collaboration with other continents or entities (e.g., OECD, Europe’s REACH Program).

Participants agreed that at present, all users are essentially treated in the same way: they have the option of reading the report and using *Taking Stock Online* (it was pointed out that, unlike other users, the media also obtain interviews from the CEC about *Taking Stock*). The uses of *Taking Stock* will largely depend on the types of users and their needs. The following comments were made about how some users use the report:

**Governments** are the recipients of the data; we need to better understand how they use the data (e.g., for decision-making)

- Governments need to contextualize the data - for instance, via the Atlas: relating the information to aquifers, recycling efforts, sector activities, and so on (*Semarnat* will be attempting to provide more context to its reports (after the first year), including industry successes.

**Industry** can view *Taking Stock* in a negative way, because the report does not discuss progress made by industry, existing regulations, and so on. In particular, grouping releases and transfers together is not helpful and only makes industry look bad. If CEC wants “buy-in” from industry, it needs to reflect progress (i.e., by mentioning progressive companies, not only the “top 10” largest polluters).

**NGOs** are users of *Taking Stock* information, and often re-package it (using the data in their own publications)

- NGOs get asked: What are you going to do about this problem? *Taking Stock* adds to the existing efforts of NGOs (e.g., advocacy work); more work is needed to make connections between initiatives in the three countries (e.g., support of domestic pollution prevention programs and industry pollution prevention efforts)
- Community activists can use *Taking Stock* in addition to the national databases, especially when looking at transboundary issues
- More efforts are required to publicize *Taking Stock* in positive ways (e.g., universities in Mexico aren’t aware of PRTRs, or of *Taking Stock*).

**Media** in Canada take more notice of *Taking Stock* compared to the U.S., perhaps because Canadians compare themselves more to the U.S.

- Possibly because *Taking Stock* currently contains only Canadian and U.S. data (except for CACs), the outreach potential for Mexico is limited. This will change with the inclusion of Mexican data
- Reporters are not “users” (they want the information fed to them); environmental reporting is often the first to be eliminated due to lack of time or resources.

**Individuals/communities** might want or need a printed report, as well as access to experts through dialogue, in order to be able to understand the information.

### **Identified Priority Information Topics**

During the meeting, participants discussed the responses received from the pre-meeting survey. Because the topics in the survey were largely drawn from a previous user survey done in 2000, current respondents were sometimes unsure about the relevance of certain questions to the present context of *Taking Stock*.

The pre-meeting survey results were compiled. In order to focus on the topics that a majority of respondents felt were fairly important, we present the survey responses (see Appendix C) according to the following:

1. Topics that at least 75% of respondents felt were important
2. Topics that 50%-74% of respondents felt were important.

We did not achieve a ranking of priority topics for *Taking Stock*, but were nonetheless able to identify issues considered to be priorities by most participants. We also obtained ideas that will be useful in providing future direction for *Taking Stock*.

The Table of Priority Information Topics that follows presents (in no particular order) the topics discussed, along with recommendations or considerations. It is not a comprehensive list, nor does it necessarily represent full consensus of the participants; but it is intended to reflect and complement the comments received in the pre-meeting survey (Appendix C). It was more difficult to establish what information should be retained in the printed report and what should be on the website; related comments are provided below the table.

**Table of Priority Information Topics**

Topic / Recommendations or Considerations	Printed report? (see comments below)	TS Online? (see comments below)
<b>ANALYSES (providing additional context to the data analyses)</b>		
Provide information on national regulatory frameworks, for ease of understanding	Provide links to the website	(easy to manage - this info would not change very often)
Provide geographic analyses***		Cooperate with 3 parties to develop a common PRTR Atlas framework (via a working group – e.g., EPA’s Landview Project)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritize chemicals; Discuss exposure pathways (i.e., mercury exposure through fish consumption), rather than just using the “top 10 chemicals released” approach</li> <li>• Rankings should focus on priority chemicals</li> </ul>	X	Provide links to health and environmental info sources
Include sector analyses (leverage work done by government on economic/ performance indicators - it’s too much for the CEC alone)***		Provide links to work done on specific sectors (industry and government initiatives)
Analyze and compare releases by production (intensity) and discuss efficient technologies***		
<b>ACCESS TO THE MATCHED DATA SET</b>		
Integration of RETC data (Mexico): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• focus on positive aspects of publicly available data</li> <li>• compare to the U.S. &amp; Canada</li> </ul>	Chapter on RETC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate RETC into the database</li> </ul>
Enhance capacity to search the database		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include searchable and downloadable data (for the complete database)</li> <li>• Have access to “favorite” searches (most popular)</li> <li>• Build capability to search for multiple chemicals or sectors at the same time</li> </ul>
Reflect the notion of the N.A. “pollution pie” : PRTR data present only part of all pollution sources (some sectors don’t report - e.g., agriculture); and some activities of reporting sectors are not covered (e.g., on-site waste management)***	illustration of “pollution pie”	Provide links to other sources of information (e.g., air monitoring)

Topic / Recommendations or Considerations	Printed report? (see comments below)	TS Online? (see comments below)
<b>TIME TRENDS (number of data sets, additional information to include)</b>		
Keep most inclusive trend data (i.e., data sets that cover most chemicals, sectors), such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1-year change data (highlight any significant changes)</li> <li>• trend for last 3 years</li> <li>• 8-10-year trend</li> </ul>	Drop 1995 data set from report  Provide summaries of main differences over time  Include trend information for the consistent facilities reporting in both the first and last year of a trend data set	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have access to all datasets on website</li> <li>• Is there a way to maintain and access former names of a facility?</li> </ul>
Can we provide more context? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reasons for increases or decreases? (this info is not on reporting forms)***</li> <li>• present innovation and pollution prevention efforts in industry?***</li> </ul>	X	Provide links to industry information (especially facilities mentioned in report) on innovation and pollution prevention
<b>RELEASES AND TRANSFERS (making a distinction between them)</b>		
Explain distinction between releases and transfers, & transfers for recycling or other treatment (also distinguish according to risks to health and the environment)***	X	
Important to have aggregate data, especially when exploring P2 and policy reforms	X	
Adding together releases and transfers are important for tracking and managing overall environmental loadings. Also, separating the two is useful for comparing facilities	X	
Cross-boundary transfers: continued priority for all transfers involving different jurisdictions; would be good to discuss destinations of transfers***	X	Need to add information on these transfers to the website (database)

Topic / Recommendations or Considerations	Printed report? (see comments below)	TS Online? (see comments below)
<b>SPECIAL FEATURE CHAPTER</b>		
Process for selecting special feature chapters should reflect input from governments and stakeholders *** (Semarnat should suggest a feature chapter – with new RETC data)	X	
Recycling feature chapter for TS2004: We must better define recycling (e.g., is it legal/illegal? And describe the categorization process)***	X	
Other suggestion: Analyze industry sectors	X	
Other suggestion: Analysis of the shift from On-site releases to Off-site transfers. Comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This information is not available on reporting forms; will require interviews***</li> <li>• Regulations, market forces, and lack of facility space can affect decisions to make off-site shifts</li> <li>• Wastes are sometimes recycled into new products, so how do we adequately track this information?</li> </ul>	X	
<b>HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS OF TOXIC SUBSTANCES</b>		
Provide context to the data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Point to other sources of information, e.g.: ambient air monitoring, to illustrate the “cause-effect” of chemicals</li> <li>• Relate information to key urban centers and to biodiversity/ecosystems</li> <li>• Prioritize chemicals, explain important issues; also compare to other (international) situations</li> </ul>	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide links to sources of information about health and the environment</li> <li>• Provide links to regulations, allowable thresholds, and national monitoring information</li> <li>• Map the data</li> </ul>

\*\*\* items where participants suggested that the national PRTR systems need to obtain more complete information from facilities, or where the CEC can coordinate work with the parties to achieve results.



Additional comments made during the meeting about presentation of the information in the printed report and *Taking Stock Online*:

- Have a short, summary document which is easily understandable and contains key messages (similar to the *Taking Stock* “summary” produced in 2000)
- Have a 5-page summary, along with the feature chapter (TRI currently produces this type of document, with all tables and charts on the web; NPRI uses a set of fact sheets, but says that even these do not seem to be reaching the audience)
- Introduce in the printed document the website tools that readers can use online
- It was also suggested that we create a “personal touch” in the printed report:
  - Include six short essays, by various stakeholders, about what they find interesting in that year’s report
  - Include a case study (one page) to illustrate the “stories” behind the report (could also be a story about an industry initiative)
- Tables and charts should be removed from the report and kept on the website
- Elements that don’t change very often (e.g., regulations, policies) can be made available on the website
- Some participants felt it is important to keep the big report, because the website can be difficult to navigate (users don’t like when websites change year-to-year); but a big report will only be read if it is understandable and explains the data
- Give users the option of having a CD-Rom of the report
- Divide the report into shorter segments for easier downloading through the website
- To view a full page when conducting a data search, we could create “pages” that can be turned, as in a book (see National Academy of Sciences website reports)
- Can we identify and track website users and what is most consulted on our site? (at the moment, we can identify the country and the server used to access the site; but CEC is planning more – e.g., have a list of subscribers to an e-mail list). In Mexico, users might be less inclined to give their coordinates (privacy issue)
- We could have a “customer satisfaction” survey on our site.

**Next Steps**

All meeting participants will have the opportunity to provide feedback on the present summary. Over the next few months, the CEC Secretariat will work on incorporating some of the recommendations that reflect a wide consensus among participants into the 2004 *Taking Stock* report and website.

The CEC will continue to discuss further options for presenting the *Taking Stock* information at the annual meeting of the PRTR Consultative Group, to be held in San Diego on November 28-29, 2006.

Longer-term considerations, particularly technological options for enhancing *Taking Stock Online*, will be the subject of further discussion:

- mapping of PRTR data
- database and information management
- financial and technical constraints.

