Pollutant release registers are key tools to help curb air pollution

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Commentary

Recent articles highlighting potential weakening of air pollution regulations in the United States should be a cause for concern for public health worldwide (Nature Editorial, 2019; Tollefson, 2019). Environmental regulations to curb air pollution, particularly fine-particle pollution, should be based on sound scientific evidence, not politics. Unfortunately, members of the public seldom read scientific articles published in reputable journals, but they do listen to politicians.

However, members of the public can learn more about atmospheric pollutant releases, including fine-particulate matter from industrial facilities under 'right-to-know' legislation and public disclosure principles, using Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs). PRTRs are a key policy tools designed to curb air pollution and are used widely in many countries and help support enforcement of environmental pollution control regulations. The US Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) launched the first PRTR, the Toxic Release Inventory (TRI) in 1987 (US EPA, 2019) and Canada followed suit with the National Pollutant Release Inventory (NPRI) in 1993 (Government of Canada, 2019). Whilst PRTRs have been criticised for data accuracy and under reporting (Hoffman et al., 2015; Walker, 2018; Johnston Edwards and Walker, 2019), they are still effective tools to curb air pollution through increased public understanding and engagement in decision-making.

Author statement

The author confirms that there are no known conflicts of interest associated with this commentary article.

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