Environment Canada Environnement Canada

FACT SHEET – Release Guidelines

This fact sheet outlines some of the key characteristics of release guidelines as a risk management instrument. Risk management instruments are policy tools that are put in place with respect to a substance or sector and used to help protect the environment or human health.

What are release guidelines?

The *Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999* (CEPA 1999) defines release guidelines as recommended limits[1] to releases, including "limits expressed as concentrations or quantities, for the release of substances into the environment from works, undertakings or activities" (paragraph 54(1)(*c*)). This voluntary instrument sets out official national guidelines that should be followed by those subject to them.

Part 3 of CEPA 1999 gives the Minister of the Environment and the Minister of Health authority to publish release guidelines for the intention of preserving the environment or human health. They can also be published by the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment. Under this authority, release guidelines may be used to control any aspect of a substance's life-cycle, from its manufacture to its use, storage, transport, release and ultimate disposal.

Release guidelines are flexible instruments in the sense that:

- The choice for the best approach to achieve the limit is determined by those following the release guideline;
- They provide flexibility in terms of jurisdictional cooperation, considerations and convergence; and
- They can be adopted at any level of government, by industry and internationally.

When are release guidelines used?

Release guidelines can be used as the sole risk management instrument, or as part of a mix of instruments to address pollution, including CEPA toxic substances.[2]

In general, release guidelines serve as an appropriate instrument when:

- Risk management objectives are clear, but the specific actions required to meet them are not;

[1] Limits might also be referred to as standards, guidelines or targets.

[2] As found on Schedule 1, the List of Toxic Substances, in CEPA 1999.

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- Detailed technical information does not have to be communicated to the affected sectors;
- Numerical restrictions on use/release can be developed, standardized and measured;
- There is a willingness among the intended users to implement the guideline;
- Jurisdictional considerations prevent the use of other instruments;
- There is a need to minimize duplication with other jurisdictions;
- There is a desire to achieve early action on a substance(s); or
- There are generally few release points of the substance(s) over its life-cycle.

How are release guidelines developed?

The development process will vary depending on the nature of the instrument and the objectives that are being proposed. Information to create guidelines is gathered from a number of sources, including industry, other governments (for example, provincial or international), environmental groups and primary data collected by Environment Canada.

Consultation during the drafting and finalization stages of instrument development is critical for relevance and uptake by the intended audience. Environment Canada is committed to consult with stakeholders in the development of release guidelines. Consultation improves transparency and helps to create a better understanding of the instrument and its objective. To reinforce this importance, the Minister must, under section 54 of CEPA 1999, offer to consult with provincial and Aboriginal governments before publishing a final instrument.

Common elements

- Introduction, purpose and objective
- An overview of the targeted activities and life-cycle
- The environmental or health concerns
- Recommended release limit(s)
- Data collection, reporting and verification processes

Want to know more?

Examples of guidelines that have been developed are available on:

The CEPA Environmental Registry at: www.ec.gc.ca/lcpe-cepa

The Chemical Substances Portal at: www.chemicalsubstanceschimiques.gc.ca/index-eng.php

Please direct your comments and questions to:

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