

# Follow-up to the Evaluation of the Accelerated Reduction and Elimination of Toxics Initiative (ARET)

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***Audit and Evaluation Branch***

**Report Clearance Steps**

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**Acronyms used in the report**

ARET	Accelerated Reduction and Elimination of Toxics
ARET II	Successor to ARET
CEPA	Canadian Environmental Protection Act
EPA(s)	Environmental Performance Agreement(s)
NPRI	National Pollutant Release Inventory
PSL2	Priority Substance List 2

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## Follow-up to the Evaluation of ARET

This follow-up was initiated approximately one year after the initial report on Evaluation of the Accelerated Reduction and Elimination of Toxics Initiative (ARET) was released in April 2000. The follow-up was done in order to determine the level of implementation of the recommendations made in the original report. Follow-ups are important, as they give senior management a crucial indicator as to the implementation rate of recommendations and adjustments made in relation to the management responses.

Many of the necessary actions to address the recommendations made in the Evaluation of ARET have now been taken or are at various stages of being addressed by the National Office of Pollution Prevention (NOPP). As a result it is recommended that no further follow-up actions be taken.

## Context and Current Status

ARET, which stands for Accelerated Reduction / Elimination of Toxics, was a voluntary, non-regulatory initiative launched in 1994, that targets 117 toxic substances, including 30 that persist in the environment and may accumulate in living organisms.

ARET was guided by a Stakeholders Committee established in 1992 which includes representatives from industry, health and professional associations, and federal and provincial governments.

Environment Canada undertook an evaluation of ARET to help the Department make a decision about its continued support for the ARET initiative and its future participation in the Stakeholders Committee as well as its support to the ARET Secretariat.

The main focus of the evaluation was on assessing the effectiveness of the initiative, that is the extent to which participation in ARET can be considered as being responsible for the reduction / eliminating emissions of toxic substances and is meeting reduction targets.

The main conclusion of the ARET evaluation report was that ARET challenge targets were met (except for those substances that are persistent and bioaccumulative) and in most cases exceeded. However, the evaluation also found that the ARET initiative was not one of the main factors in motivating industry to reduce releases of toxic substances. Other factors such as regulations, modernization, and business decisions played a more important role.

The evaluation also concluded that ARET raised the profile of toxic substances with industry, helped industry focus its efforts on reducing emissions, and helped improve working relations between industry and government but, at the same time, might have strained relations between the government and Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (ENGOS).

The original recommendations from the evaluation report were:

- to develop an integrated information tool for identifying best opportunities for using voluntary measures for the management of toxic substances; and

- to have in place a stricter framework when using voluntary programs.

The follow-up has discovered that many of the recommendations from the original report have already been addressed or are at various stages of being actioned. For example, the new Policy Framework for Environmental Performance Agreements was released last year. Subsequently, the successor to the original ARET program, the Proposed ARET II Program - Draft Program Description, has recently been released. As recommended in the original report, the new program is based upon the criteria and principles from the policy framework which will enhance the credibility and effectiveness of the program.

Recent management actions have also indicated that the department is looking at different alternatives and is considering the feasibility of creating a database to assist in tracking activities and tools used in the risk management of toxic substances. Work has already begun on using a more integrated approach for managing release data and information. For example the National Pollutant Release Inventory (NPRI) platform will now be used for collecting and reporting ARET II release data. In addition, work continues on a variety of risk assessment and management tools to manage toxic substances. There has also been some evidence of stronger linkages toward other toxic management policies, programs and tools.

## Areas Requiring Attention

Although a number of positive steps have already been taken to address the original recommendations, there is still some room for improvement. Notwithstanding these recent improvements, the program is still missing a discrete integrated information tool for decision-making on the management of toxic substances. This type of tool would include a common inventory of toxic substances and candidate substances for early action (and emitters of those substances), as well as a comprehensive inventory of risk management tools. Such a system would allow for the identification of gaps and understanding of issues, thus permitting the identification of the best tools, including voluntary measures for the management of toxic substances.

Consequently, it is important that there is a continued effort on developing risk management tools (e.g. risk management strategies and guidelines / codes of practice) for the management of toxic substances, as well as strengthening key linkages (e.g. risk managers and sector specialists). Also continued efforts toward strengthening linkages with other toxic management programs such as the Federal Pollution Prevention Strategy and the Options Evaluation Process would be useful.

## Risks

The actions taken by the National Office of Pollution Prevention since the conduct of the evaluation have already addressed many of the concerns identified in the recommendations. This progress is expected to continue and as such, does not pose any undue risk to the department.

## Summary of Recommendations and Management Actions

### Recommendations

#### Recommendation #1 - ***Some improvement required***

Based on the findings of the evaluation, it is recommended that the Assistant Deputy Minister, Environmental Protection Service, develop an integrated information tool for decision-making on the management of toxic substances. This tool should comprise:

- an inventory of substances of concern and emitters of those substances in order to better understand risks to human health and the environment; and
- a national inventory of current tools in place to manage risks associated with toxic and potentially toxic substances.

#### Recommendation #2 - ***Met***

It is recommended that the Assistant Deputy Minister, Environmental Protection Service, ensures that Environment Canada's participation in any voluntary measure to manage toxic substances be conditional upon:

- the existence of strong motivation and commitment on the part of the emitters to go beyond "business as usual" to reduce toxic substances;
- the compliance with the draft departmental policy framework for voluntary measures; and
- strong linkages with other toxic substances policies, programs and tools, including the National Pollutant Release Inventory, the Federal Pollution Prevention Strategy and the Options Evaluation Process.

### Management Actions

The follow-up has found that many of the recommendations made in the ARET evaluation report have already been met or are at various stages of being addressed. For example, the department has recognized the need for consistent criteria to guide the use of voluntary measures. Subsequently, the new Policy Framework for Environmental Performance Agreements was released in June 2001, which will help to ensure that future voluntary initiatives are credible and effective. The new policy takes into consideration the findings and recommendations of the ARET evaluation report, the recommendations of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development in his 1999 Report on Managing Toxic Substances, as well as the principles and criteria recommended by the New Directions Group.

Another major accomplishment has been the development of the draft framework for the successor to ARET, the Proposed ARET II Program - Draft Program Description, as well as the complementary Marketing and Implementation Strategy. This new initiative will help to support a more credible program with demonstrable results, including a regulatory backstop, to go beyond "business as usual" in the management of toxic substances through voluntary measures. The development of the successor program has taken into consideration the criteria and principles from the new Policy Framework for Environmental Performance Agreements (EPAs), the recommendations of the ARET evaluation and the report of the

Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development on Toxics, as well as the principles and criteria recommended by the New Directions Group.

Another major initiative for ARET II has been the development of a common reporting platform for collecting and reporting ARET II release data. The existing NPRI protocol will be used to collect release data from the ARET II program as well as other toxic management programs such as EPAs. This type of reporting was recommended by the original evaluation and is also consistent with the Policy Framework for Environmental Performance Agreements.

There have also been a variety of risk assessment and risk management tools and frameworks that have been developed to support ARET. These tools are being used to improve collective decision-making on the management of toxic substances. Examples of these include:

- Toxics Management Process - risk management tool for identifying risk management strategies and tools for decision-making;
- Regulatory and Consultation Steps for Toxics Management;
- Proposed Risk Assessment and Management Framework (ARET II) - risk assessment and management tool for CEPA toxic substances and candidate substances for early action;
- Inventory of Risk Managers and Risk Management Strategies and Tools for PSL2 Substances - ongoing activities as required by Toxic Substance Management Policy (TSMP) for virtual elimination and life cycle management of toxic substances.

And finally, the department has demonstrated a more coordinated and integrated approach for managing toxic substances, as well as stronger linkages with other policies, programs and tools. This is especially true with many of the new elements in the proposed ARET II, with particular emphasis on NPRI and EPAs.

For example, the new NPRI common reporting platform combined with more integrated substance lists, will help improve decision-making for the management of toxic substances. ARET II substance lists are becoming more integrated with other programs such as NPRI, EPAs and CEPA Domestic Substances List (DSL).

In addition, the ARET II management framework for planning, monitoring and reporting of ARET II activities and processes is becoming more integrated and coordinated with other policies, programs and tools. This is especially evident between ARET and NPRI programs and examples of these include quality control and data verification, data validation, incentive programs and cooperation with other CEPA activities and provincial programs.