Emergency Planning and Community Right-To-Know Encyclopedia Article

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Emergency Planning and Community Right-To-Know

The Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act (EPCRA) is also known as SARA Title III since it was enacted as a freestanding law included in the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986 (SARA). This law obligates facilities to provide local, state, and federal agencies with information on hazardous materials stored or in use at the premises. EPCRA covers four key issues: emergency response planning, emergency release notification, reporting hazardous chemical storage, and toxic chemical release inventory (TRI). It, however, in no way limits what chemicals may be used, stored, transported, or disposed of at a facility. EPCRA was enacted in response to the chemical disaster in Bhopal, India, where residents and emergency responders were unaware of and unprepared for the lethal chemicals in their immediate environment.

The State Emergency Response Commission (SERC) and Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPCs) must be given information concerning facilities in their area where hazardous substances are stored and/or are in use. This information is vital for the development of emergency plans to address the accidental release of toxic chemicals. Facilities must immediately notify the SERC and LEPCs of the release of hazardous material in excess of set regulations. EPCRA also requires facilities to maintain a data sheet enumerating all the hazardous materials at their workplace; they must submit it to the SERC, LEPCs, and local fire departments. Finally, facilities must provide an annual inventory listing releases or other waste management procedures involving hazardous chemicals.

Facilities and/or individuals that do not adhere to the rules established by the EPCRA can face fines and prosecution under the law. EPCRA requirements are aimed at providing communities with the information they need should an accidental release of hazardous material occur through a fire or explosion, for instance.

Bibliography

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