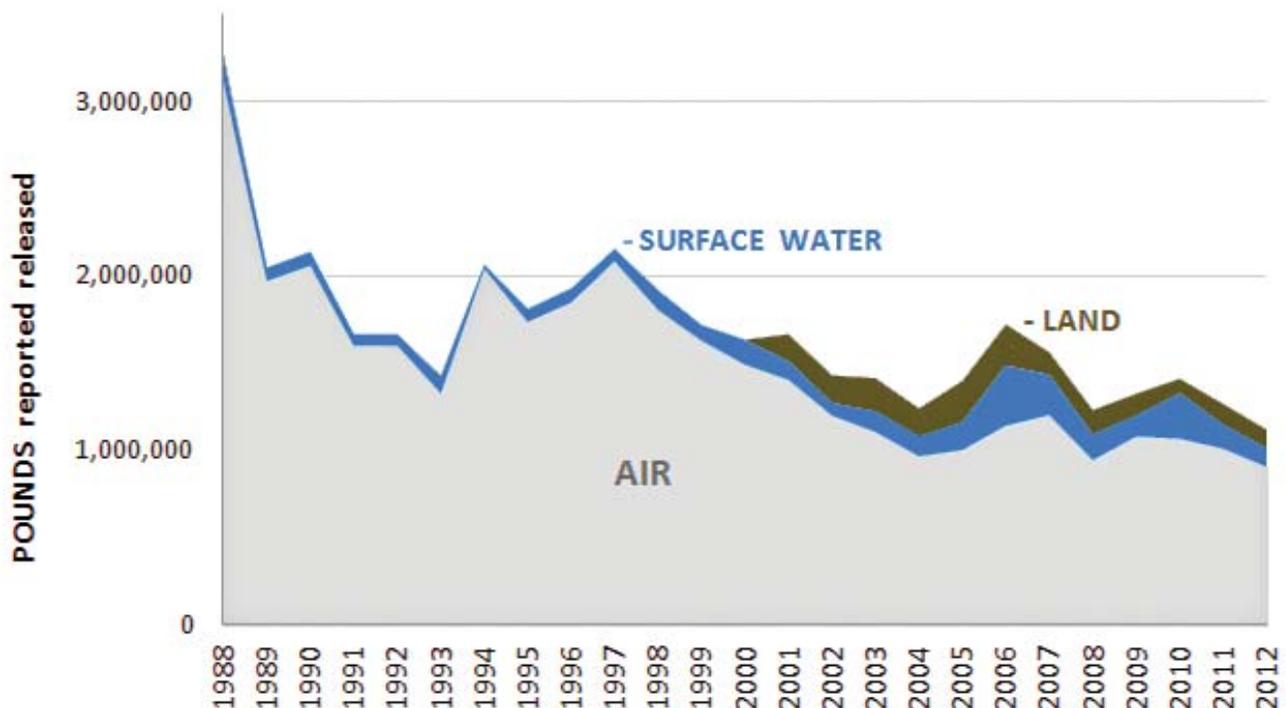


# Pierce County Environmental Health 2014



## Hazardous Waste Toxic Releases



Data Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

**Fewer pounds of toxic chemicals were reported released by 36 large facilities in 2012 than in 1988, especially to air.**

### WHY CARE?

#### Hazards

More than 60 toxic chemicals, such as lead, ammonia, and benzene, are reported by 36 large industrial manufacturing, hazardous waste treatment, and federal facilities in Pierce County.

#### Exposure

- Most releases are in the air, resulting in exposure risks through inhalation.
- Mercury and other toxics released into the air deposit back onto land and water.

#### Human health impacts

Some chemicals released are more toxic than others, so smaller amounts are more likely to impact people's health. Many of the chemicals accumulate and persist in our bodies.<sup>1</sup>

- Immediate and long-term health impacts include cancer, liver and kidney damage, and damage to nerves, blood, heart, digestive, respiratory, and immune systems.<sup>2</sup>
- Exposure to lead and certain chemicals has been linked with weight gain.<sup>3</sup>

#### Economic impacts

- Direct and indirect disease and disability costs from toxic chemicals in our environment are estimated at around \$3 billion in Washington state.<sup>4</sup> The emotional costs are also high.
- Chemical impacts on the brain can also have broad personal and societal economic impacts. Each lower IQ point is estimated to result in a loss of about \$17,000 in lifetime earnings per person.<sup>5</sup>

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

### Policy actions

After chemical releases at West Virginia and Bhopal, India facilities, U.S. industrial workers, communities, and public interest and environmental organizations demanded information on toxic chemicals released.

- The Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act of 1986 established the Toxic Release Inventory (TRI) to help communities be more informed about and prepared for chemical hazards.
- The Pollution Prevention Act of 1990 expanded the TRI. Medium, small, and unpermitted facilities and amounts often aren't tracked or easily accessible, however.<sup>6</sup>
- TRI reporting facilities in Pierce County and other areas have been identifying ways to reduce toxic chemicals and waste through employee suggestions, participative team management, and audits. Find out more at [www.epa.gov/tri/p2](http://www.epa.gov/tri/p2).

Community organizing against exposures primarily in low-income and communities of color has led to environmental justice initiatives around the country.

- Washington State Departments of Ecology and of Health used TRI data their 1995 "Study on Environmental Equity in Washington State."
- In 2007 the Northwest Toxic Communities Coalition formed for organizations to share common concerns and expert knowledge.

### Personal actions

There are many sources of toxic chemicals other than TRI facilities, including us.

- Concerns about proper disposal of pharmaceuticals have led to medicine collection programs. These help prevent poisoning and overdosing, also. Find out more at [www.takebackyourmeds.org](http://www.takebackyourmeds.org).
- Keep your home and yard free of chemicals and safe for children, pets, and birds. Find out more at [www.tpchd.org/naturalyardcare](http://www.tpchd.org/naturalyardcare).
- Properly dispose of oil, electronic waste, pharmaceuticals, pesticides, and other products. Find out where at [www.piercecountywa.org/hhw](http://www.piercecountywa.org/hhw), [www.tpchd.org/haz-waste](http://www.tpchd.org/haz-waste) or call (800) 287-6429.
- Use EnviroStars businesses. Find them at [envirostars.org](http://envirostars.org) or call (253) 798-6429.
- Help reduce air pollution: burn wood less and drive less—carpool, bus, bike and walk more.



Port of Tacoma area and Northeast Tacoma.

**Since 2010, residents have safely disposed of almost 7 tons of unused medicines at 19 collection sites around Pierce County, preventing overdoses and pollution.**

- 1 New Jersey Department of Health and Human Services Right to Know Hazardous Substance Fact Sheets.
- 2 Scorecard lists of chemicals and health effects at [www.scorecard.org](http://www.scorecard.org).
- 3 Obesogens: an Environmental Link to Obesity, *Environmental Health Perspectives*, February 2012.
- 4 Economic Costs of Diseases and Disabilities Attributable to Environmental Contaminants in Washington State: How Comprehensive Is Our Information? Kate Davies, July 2005.
- 5 Societal Costs of Exposure to Toxic Substances: Economic and Health Costs of Four Case Studies that are candidates for Environmental Causation, *Environmental Health Perspectives*, December 2001.
- 6 US Environmental Protection Agency Fact Sheet on EPCRA Section 313 Rulemaking, Persistent Bioaccumulative Toxic Chemicals.
- 7 Environmental Justice Implications of Reduced Reporting Requirements of the TRI Burden Reduction Rule, Children's Environmental Health Institute, 2008.