

The Ecocrusier

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It is my intent in this column to briefly highlight electronic resources on environmental topics. While the focus will be on Internet resources, there will be an occasional look at non-net resources.

IRIS, the Integrated Risk Information System of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, at <<http://www.epa.gov/ngispgm3/iris/>> was added to the web earlier this year. It was previously available only for a fee, though an inexpensive one, via the online network of the National Library of Medicine.

IRIS is a data base of human health effects that may result from exposure to various substances found in the environment. Currently IRIS contains files for 534 chemicals. Each file consists of summaries for the effects of a chemical as a chronic health hazard and as a carcinogen, and a bibliography of references for the presented information. U.S. EPA health scientists compile the summaries from a comprehensive review of chronic toxicity and other scientific data. There are regular, monthly uploads of updated files. The free, public access to the evaluated toxicity information in IRIS is a most welcome addition to information available on the Internet.

Actually, the official appearance of IRIS on the EPA web site in March 1997 seems to have been preceded by the inclusion of the IRIS chemical reports six months previously on the RTK NET at <<http://www.rtk.net/T866/>>, although now RTK NET has deferred to the more recent appearance at EPA and currently maintains just a link to IRIS.

RTK NET, the Right-To-Know Network, at <<http://www.rtk.net/>>, was established in order to empower citizen involvement in community and government decision-making, provides free access to numerous databases, text files, and conferences on the environment, housing, and sustainable development. It is operated by two nonprofit organizations-- OMB Watch and The Unison Institute--and funded by various

government agencies and foundations.

Besides IRIS, other environmental databases included on RTK NET are the Toxic Release Inventory (TRI), a database of information about releases and transfers of toxic chemicals from manufacturing facilities; the New Jersey Health Fact Sheets, which contains descriptions of the basic health effects caused by chemicals listed in the Toxic Release Inventory; the RM1's, which are summaries of meetings about some of the 70,000 "existing chemicals" that can be commercially produced or used under the Toxic Substances Control Act and are listed on the TSCA Inventory; TSCATS (Toxic Substances Control Act Test Submissions), which contains unpublished, nonconfidential studies submitted by U.S. industry to EPA covering chemical testing results and adverse effects of chemicals on health and ecological systems; the BRS - RCRA Biennial Reporting System, which contains reports about waste generated, shipped off site, or received by waste generators and Treatment, Disposal, and Recycling (TDR) facilities that are regulated under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act; the Resource Conservation and Recovery Information System (RCRIS), which contains information provided by generators, transporters, treaters, storers, and disposers of hazardous waste and used primarily to track handler permit or closure status, compliance with Federal and State regulations, and cleanup activities; CERCLIS, which contains basic information about 40,000 potential, proposed and final Superfund sites. You can access RTK NET via the web, bbs, or telnet. Most users can find all they need via the web. You must register to get an account to access the few databases and the database manipulation tools that are available only via telnet or by dialup to the bbs.

The TRI, CERCLIS and RCRIS databases can also be searched as part of the Envirofacts Warehouse section of the EPA web site at http://www.epa.gov/enviro/html/ef_home.html/. Envirofacts is intended as a single point of access to U.S. EPA environmental data. So here you can search at one time TRI, CERCLIS, RCRIS and several other databases like the Safe Drinking Water Information System with information about public water systems and their violations of EPA's regulations for safe drinking water, the Aerometric Information and Retrieval System/AIRS Facility Subsystem with air pollution data on approximately 150,000 facilities regulated by the U.S. EPA and/or State and local air regulatory agencies, and the Permit Compliance System with data on more than 75,000 water-discharge permits including permit issuance, permit limits, monitoring data and other information pertinent to facilities with permits. All of these databases can be searched at once or you can search any one of the databases. It's also possible to

generate reports or maps that display environmental information for the entire United States.

The Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxic at the Environmental Protection Agency produces Envirofacts and there is plenty more available from this office via their web site at <<http://www.epa.gov/opptintr/>>. This includes the searchable 8(e) TRIAGE database of health studies related to toxic substances. Also included are such publications as the "Pollution Prevention Directory," "Pollution Prevention 1997: A National Progress Report," and the "U.S. National Profile on Management of Chemicals." There are fact sheets on chemicals and periodicals like Chemicals in the Environment: Public Access Information and the Chemicals in Progress Bulletin. Especially worthwhile to check out here is "What's New", where you will find the OPPT Newsbreak, a daily current events abstracting service covering environmental, toxic, and "information age" news. You can reach the Newsbreak directly at <http://www.epa.gov/opptintr/oppt_nb.txt> . You can also subscribe to this daily news service by sending the command

subscribe OPPT-NEWSBREAK Firstname Lastname
to: listserver@valley.rtpnc.epa.gov.

You would get the idea from a quick visit to the site of Northwest Environment Watch (NEW) that there is not a lot to be found here, except for sales pitches for the organization and for the books that it publishes. But buried there on the Products page at <<http://www.northwestwatch.org/products.html/>> , after you scroll down more than halfway, are links to the NEW Indicators, short, but incisive, reports with statistical analyses of trends in the state of the environment, and on environmental economics and politics in the Pacific Northwest.

That is all I have time for this issue, but there is plenty more out there to explore and bring to your attention. I would be grateful to see your comments and suggestions about this column and its contents, so send me email at mikep@uidaho.edu.

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