



ERNS and Site Searches

Emergency Response Notification System (ERNS) Fact Sheet

Office of Emergency and Remedial Response
Emergency Response Division 5202G

Quick Reference Fact Sheet

What is ERNS?

The Emergency Response Notification System (ERNS) is a computer database containing information on release notifications of oil and hazardous substances that have occurred throughout the United States and have been reported to the National Response Center (NRC), the ten EPA Regions, or the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG). The initial notification data may be updated with information from various Federal, State, and local response authorities as appropriate. ERNS data can be used to analyze release notifications, support emergency planning efforts, and assist decision makers in developing spill prevention programs.

What is a Site Search?

In 1993, the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) published Standard E 1527 to reflect good commercial and customary practice for performing Environmental Site Assessments which are recommended by ASTM for commercial real estate transfers. This standard was developed to meet the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act requirement that all appropriate inquiry be conducted into the previous ownership and uses of the property. The ASTM standard includes searching several data sources (including the ERNS database) to gather information regarding recognized environmental conditions at the property. A site search may be accomplished by obtaining information from the ERNS database for reports related to a specific location.

How are Data Collected in ERNS?

When a call is made to the NRC or one of the ten EPA Regions, a report is created containing all of the release information that the caller provided. The data usually include information about the material and the quantity released, the discharger, and the location of the release. This report is transferred to an appropriate agency which evaluates the need for a response, and once daily all records are electronically transferred to the ERNS database. In addition, each of the EPA Regions can update ERNS records if additional information becomes available after the initial notification. However, if a caller makes an additional report to update previous data, a second record is created and transferred to the ERNS database.

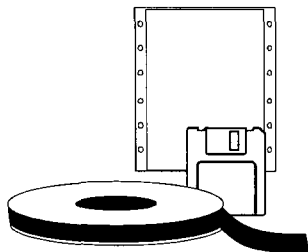


Data Limitations

Because ERNS is a database of initial notifications and not incidents, there are several limitations to the data. ERNS primarily contains initial accounts of releases, made during or immediately after a release occurs when exact details are often unknown. The data are usually not updated unless an EPA Region is involved in the response action. There may be multiple reports for a single incident, (this occurs when the caller makes a second report to update original data or a private observer reports a release that has already been reported by the facility). Because reports are taken over the phone, transcription errors (e.g., misspellings of discharger or location information), occasionally limit the quality of some data.

How are Site Search Data Available?

ERNS site search data are available in various report formats and can either be delivered via First Class Mail or e-mail through the Internet. The standard format is a one-page report per release notification in various word processing formats. This format is useful for requestors who are interested in a limited number of sites. There are several alternatives for requestors who need more data.



Reports of notifications from specific counties or states: These reports may be produced in the one-page standard report format in various word processing formats or in dBASE® files. This is particularly useful for requestors who need information about many sites within a state or county. These requestors may wish to obtain state- or county-wide information instead of making multiple data requests by site.

ERNS database: This is recommended for requestors who have extensive needs for ERNS data. The database is available two ways, (1) all data by year which is available on magnetic data tapes from the National Technical Information Service (NTIS), or (2) data for each EPA Region by year which may be downloaded from EPA via the Internet, direct dial-in, or FedWorld. The magnetic data tapes may be purchased from NTIS in Springfield, VA at (703) 487-4650. Information on downloading data may be obtained by calling the ERNS Information Line (see "Obtaining ERNS Data").

Requesting and Receiving Data

When requesting a search of ERNS, you should include several pieces of information to expedite the search process and to ensure an exhaustive search of the database. The request should include the discharger organization, if available, and the street address of the site, including the county.

Standard reports include the following information: the date of the release and the notification, report number, discharger organization and address, material and quantity released, the location of the release, and the cause and source of the release. Some of the fields may be left blank when information is unknown at the time of the notification or is caller information that is protected by the Privacy Act of 1974. A report of the ERNS results will be completed in approximately two weeks or sooner if either a phone call or a fax reporting the results of the search is sufficient.

What Will it Cost?

The cost of obtaining ERNS data is based on the data storage medium requested and the time and effort expended to fill the request. The fee policy is described in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), 40 CFR 2.120. EPA charges \$20.00 per hour of programming time, and \$8.00 per labor hour of downloading and preparation time. There are additional charges for data storage media such as diskettes. If the total cost is under \$25.00, the fee is waived. If, however, EPA has reason to believe that a requestor or group of requestors is breaking down a request into a series of smaller requests to avoid charges, the requests will be combined to determine the total cost. Currently there is no charge for obtaining data through the Internet. Please contact NTIS for information on their prices.

Obtaining ERNS Data

Site searches or additional information on the ERNS data base may be obtained by calling the ERNS Information Line at (202) 260-2342, by sending an e-mail request to erns.info@epamail.epa.gov, or by writing to EPA at the following address:

