



# An Overview of ERNS

## Emergency Response Notification System (ERNS)

### Fact Sheet

Office of Emergency and Remedial Response  
Emergency Response Division OS-210

Quick Reference Fact Sheet

The Emergency Response Notification System (ERNS) is a national computer database used to store information on releases of oil and hazardous substances. The ERNS program is a cooperative data sharing effort among the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Headquarters, the Department of Transportation (DOT) Research and Special Programs Administration's John A. Volpe National Transportation Systems Center (VNTSC), the ten EPA Regions, and the National Response Center (NRC). EPA Headquarters manages and funds ERNS, and the VNTSC provides operation and maintenance support through an interagency agreement with EPA. ERNS provides the most comprehensive data compiled on release notifications of oil and hazardous substances in the United States. Since its inception in 1986, more than 160,000 release notifications have been entered into ERNS.

#### RELEASE NOTIFICATIONS IN ERNS\*

Notification Type:	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
CERCLA	4,582	5,060	6,554	6,174	5,885
Oil	15,577	15,167	16,074	18,846	19,264
Other	8,518	9,647	11,476	9,239	10,504
<b>Total for Year</b>	<b>28,677</b>	<b>29,874</b>	<b>34,104</b>	<b>34,259</b>	<b>35,653</b>

CERCLA: Substances designated as hazardous substances under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980, as amended, section 103.

Oil: Any oil discharge which: 1) causes a sheen to appear on the surface of the water; 2) violates applicable water quality standards; or 3) causes sludge or emulsion to be deposited beneath the surface of the water or upon the adjoining shorelines, reported in accordance with section 311 of the CWA.

Other: This category includes non-CERCLA, non-oil substances along with substances that could not be identified at the time of the release.

#### HOW ARE NOTIFICATIONS COLLECTED IN ERNS?

The ERNS data are captured electronically when a release is reported to the NRC or EPA. When a release report is submitted to Federal authorities, the individual reporting the release is asked a series of questions concerning the release. This information is then immediately transferred to the appropriate Federal response authority. For example, when the NRC receives the initial notification of a release, the information is immediately transmitted to the appropriate Federal On-Scene Coordinator (OSC) in an EPA Regional Office or Coast Guard District Office, depending upon the release location. In some cases reports are made directly to the EPA or United States Coast Guard (USCG) offices, at which time the Federal response authorities make a response determination. The OSC then relays the information to the appropriate State and local response authorities, as necessary.

Information concerning all releases originally reported to the NRC and EPA Regional Offices is entered into local computers and transmitted electronically from the NRC or EPA Regional Office to the VNTSC, where it becomes part of the ERNS national database. Each EPA Region maintains its own Region-specific database, which is a subset of the national database.

\* All numbers are based on initial notification to the Federal government and may not have been verified.

## WHAT INFORMATION IS IN ERNS?

Information is recorded in ERNS when a release is **initially** reported to the Federal government. These **initial notifications** contain the preliminary release information available at the time of the release. The information in ERNS is "unverified" because at the time of the release, some of the information reported to the Federal government may be incomplete or inaccurate. Depending upon the severity of the release and the response actions taken, the EPA or Coast Guard OSC obtains further information on the release by assisting at the site or discussing the incident with State, local, or other response officials. Where notification information is verified, more detailed data on the release may be added to ERNS, including information related to response actions. Often, however, the only information found in ERNS is information derived from the initial notification.

## UNDER WHAT AUTHORITIES ARE THE NOTIFICATIONS IN ERNS REPORTED?

There are primarily five Federal statutes that require release reporting. Part or all of the information from these reports may be collected in ERNS. These statutes and their resulting regulations, their citations, and their relationship to ERNS are shown in the following table:

### APPLICABLE FEDERAL STATUTES/REGULATIONS:

Statute	Cite	Description
CERCLA Section 103	40 CFR, Part 302, Section 302.6	This section requires that releases of hazardous substances which meet or exceed their reportable quantity (RQ) be reported to the NRC, who in turn will notify the appropriate Federal On-Scene Coordinator (OSC). These releases account for 17% of all the notifications in ERNS.
SARA Title III Section 304	40 CFR, Part 355	In this section, the release of an RQ or more, of a CERCLA hazardous substance or a SARA extremely hazardous substance, must be reported to Federal authorities. Non-CERCLA EHS releases must be reported to the State Emergency Response Commission (SERC) of any state likely to be affected by the release and to the Community Emergency Coordinator for the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) of any area likely to be affected by the release. It should be noted that few of these notifications are incorporated into the ERNS database. Transportation-related releases must be reported to the 911 emergency number or, in the absence of a 911 number, to a telephone operator.
CWA Section 311	40 CFR, Part 110, Section 110.10	This Section requires persons who release oil and hazardous substances to report the release to the appropriate Federal Agency, who will then immediately notify the appropriate state agency of any state which may be affected by the discharge. In the oil discharge regulations promulgated under this act, EPA establishes 3 categories of reportable discharges of oil. A discharge must be immediately reported to the NRC if it: 1) causes a sheen to appear on the surface of the water; 2) violates applicable water quality standards; or 3) causes sludge or emulsion to be deposited beneath the surface of the water or upon the adjoining shorelines. Oil notifications account for 52% of all notifications in ERNS.
CWA Section 311(b)(3)	40 CFR, Part 300, Sections 300.125, 300.300, 300.405	The NCP regulations require that oil or hazardous substance releases which violate the CWA be immediately reported to the NRC. If direct reporting to the NRC is not practicable, reports may be made to the Coast Guard or EPA designated OSC for the geographic area in which the discharge occurred.
HMTA Section 1808(b)	40 CFR, Subchapter C, Section 171.15	The HMTA requires dischargers to notify the NRC if as a direct result of the release: (1) a person is killed; (2) a person receives injuries requiring hospitalization; (3) estimated carrier or other damage exceeds \$50,000; (4) an evacuation of the general public occurs lasting one or more hours; (5) one or more major transportation arteries or facilities are closed or shut down for one hour or more; or (6) the operational flight pattern or routine of an aircraft is altered. Although these releases are reported under DOT authority, they may also be subject to EPA authority.

CERCLA: The Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980, as amended.  
 SARA: The Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986, as amended.  
 CWA: The Clean Water Act of 1972, as amended.  
 HMTA: The Hazardous Material Transportation Act of 1974, as amended.  
 NCP: The National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan, as published under section 311(d) of the CWA, as amended by section 4201(b) of the Oil Pollution Act of 1990, or revised under section 105 of CERCLA

## WHAT IS ERNS USED FOR?

The primary purpose of ERNS is to standardize and collect notifications made to the Federal government of releases of oil and hazardous substances. These notifications are used by OSCs during, before and after data are entered into ERNS, to determine an appropriate Federal response action. Currently, ERNS data are used to assist decision makers in solving emergency response and release prevention issues. Specific examples of ERNS data applications include:

- Guidance and Regulatory Development
- Responses to Congressional Inquiries
- Response Preparedness
- Compliance and Enforcement Support
- Statistical and Trend Analysis
- Environmental Planning
- Spill Prevention Programs
- Legal Analyses
- Property Transfers/Site Audits
- Academic Research

## WHAT TYPES OF ERNS DATA ARE AVAILABLE?

ERNS data is available to the public in various forms including computerized copies, printouts, summarized release totals, or 6250 BPI magnetic data tapes. Each of these formats serve a different purpose; the decision regarding what type of information is chosen depends on the individual needs of the requestor. Cost for providing ERNS data is determined based on the materials used and the time and effort expended to fill the request. General descriptions of the information formats are provided below:

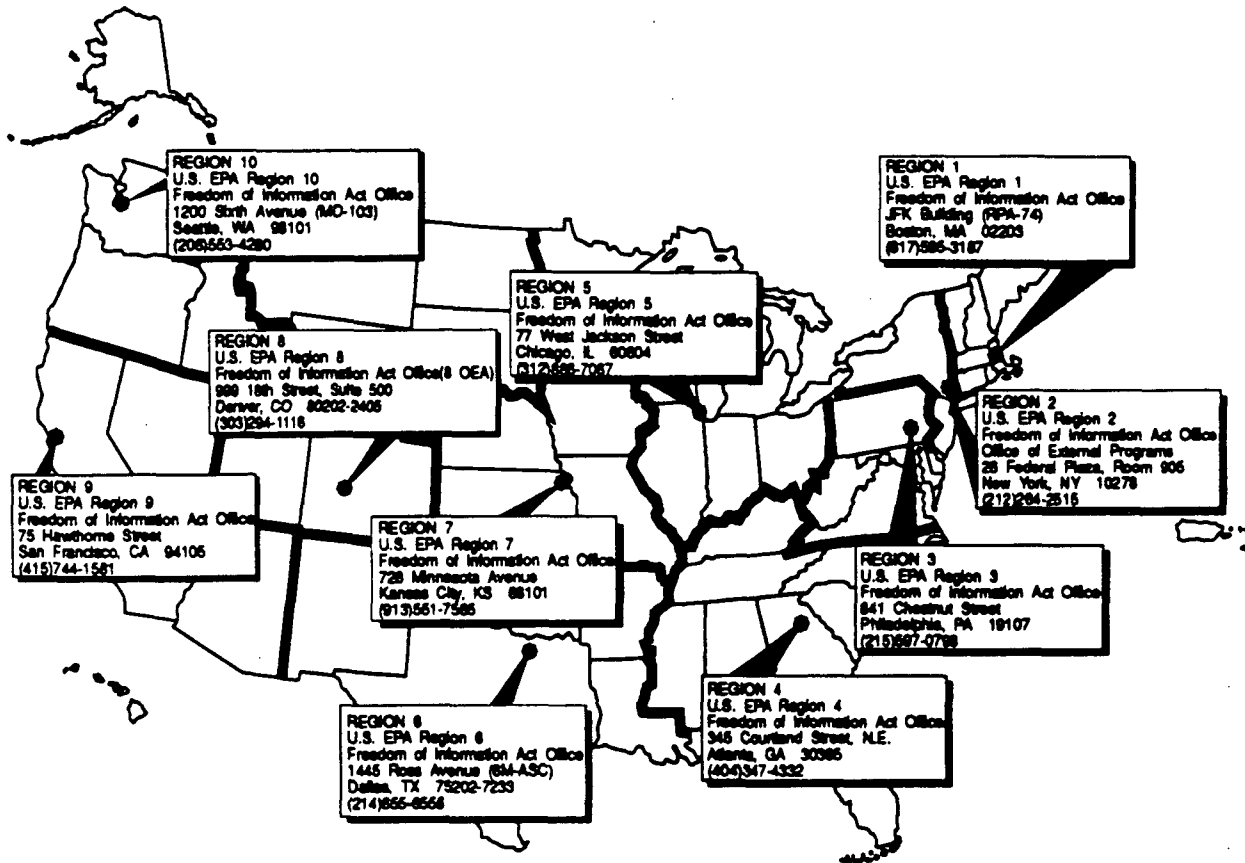
- **Standard ERNS Reports:** These reports provide a one page summary of the releases as reported to the Federal government. Standard ERNS reports can be obtained on a floppy disk or as a computer printout, depending upon the number of reports requested. Generally, these reports are best for providing specific information on a small subset of data. Searches best suited for this format include: searching for specific report numbers, searching for specific release dates, searching for specific dischargers, searching for information on specific chemicals, and searching for information on the county, city or address of the release.
- **Summary Release Totals:** This information is best suited for analyzing trends, or making comparisons of broad groups. Summary Information reports are not as detailed as the ERNS reports, but offer the requestor a broad overview of data. Examples of uses for Summary Information reports include: Comparisons of the number of release reports between States/calendar years/EPA Regions or cities, comparison of the number of release reports for broad chemical groups, and release reports categorized by the quantity of the material released.
- **Magnetic Data Tapes:** These tapes can be obtained in either ASCII or EBCDIC formats for each year in the database. Included with each tape is a data dictionary which references terms used in the ERNS national database and a Tapeout log showing record and block lengths including the number of records and blocks contained in each file. These tapes are typically provided to requestors who have extensive needs for ERNS data, and who have the hardware necessary to operate magnetic data tapes.

## HOW CAN ERNS DATA BE OBTAINED?

Information on the ERNS system and data may be obtained by calling the ERNS Information Line at (202) 260-2342, or by contacting the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Officer in the specific EPA Region of interest. Addresses and telephone numbers of the EPA Regional FOIA offices are provided below. For more extensive materials, write to the EPA Headquarters FOIA Officer at:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
Freedom of Information Act Office (A-101)  
401 M Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20460

# EPA Regional Contacts for ERNS Information



United States  
Environmental Protection  
Agency (OS-120)  
Washington, DC 20460

Official Business  
Penalty for Private Use  
\$300