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Retrieval and scientific interpretation of ecotoxicological information

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Community Health Status

Community health studies investigate and define the health characteristics of a community. The baseline health status of a potential receptor community can be determined prior to the inception of industrial activities that might result in community exposure. Baseline health is a factor determining community health resilience or vulnerability to the health impacts of proposed industrial developments. Therefore, the assessment of the community health status is one of the requirements listed in the International Finance Corporation (IFC) Performance Standards for consideration during the financial viability assessment of large industrial developments, e.g., mines and coal-fired electrical power plants. Baseline health is also a point of reference for potential future improvements in the health status of the community, for example, due to expected improvements in health services, or expected improvements in the socio-economic status of a community benefitting from improved rates of employment.

A community is a group of people sharing a geographical area of interest. Prevalences of communicable and non-communicable diseases and immunisation status are important community health status indicators. The indicators are the basis of the quantification of potential community health risks and the assessment of impacts associated with existing and/or planned industrial releases. INFOTOX has conducted desktop and community-based health studies in settings of health complaints arising from alleged exposure to industrial emissions and in settings of proposed mining activities. INFOTOX is experienced in the application of standard health investigation protocols and the Equator Principle, which is the framework for management of environmental and social issues in international project financing.

INFOTOX has conducted extensive field studies to address potential risks and impacts to affected communities due to activities related to proposed industrial projects. Studies conducted in rural villages assessed the health status through selected medical examinations; determined the nutritional status, and assessed the availability and adequacy of health care facilities, bearing in mind the proposed industrial development and influx of people. Groups of individuals can also be identified that are at risk of being differentially or disproportionately affected by the project, because of their disadvantaged or vulnerable status.

INFOTOX has also assessed exposure of members of the community to toxic substances through biological monitoring by blood and urine sampling for subsequent pathology laboratory analysis. The resultant pathology reports were interpreted with regard to reflected exposure levels and potentially associated health risks, or the lack thereof. The risks, as well as mitigation measures, if applicable, are reported to the client for communication with the communities or authorities, depending on the needs of the client.

