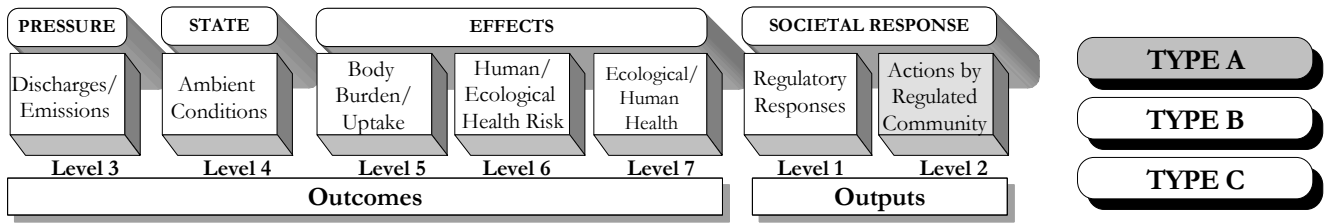




TRIBES



Indicator: Number of Active and Closed Underground Storage Tanks on Tribal Lands

An underground storage tank system (UST) is a tank and any underground piping connected to the tank that has at least 10 percent of its combined volume underground (USEPA). The federal UST regulations pertain solely to underground tanks and piping that contain either petroleum or certain hazardous substances. Under UST regulations, owners and operators of USTs located on tribal lands must register with the EPA.

USTs can be of special concern to the environment and health of Native Americans because petroleum or other hazardous substances can leak into the soil and contaminate groundwater, an important source for drinking water. Among other environmental and health risks associated with USTs is the potential for fire and explosion. Through the mid-1980's, the majority of USTs were constructed from bare steel, which eventually corrodes and causes the contents of USTs to seep out. Substandard installation or poor operating and maintenance measures can also lead USTs to discharge their contents into the environment.

Although federal regulations call for technical requirements to install and operate new tanks, and to maintain and upgrade existing tanks, releases of UST contents still present a problem. Additional requirements for the correct operation of USTs consist of release detection, corrosion protection for metal USTs and piping, recordkeeping, release reporting, corrective action, and financial responsibility. Principally, the goals of UST regulations endeavor to prevent, identify, and clean up leaks and spills.

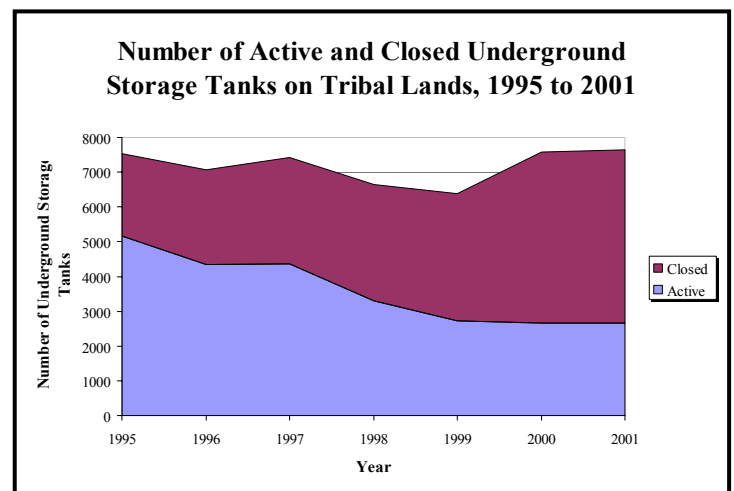
A substantial number of tribes own and/or operate service stations with underground storage tanks. There are also independently owned tanks located on tribal lands and within the exterior boundaries of Reservations.

The number of active and closed USTs on Indian lands can provide a way to measure the extent of their prevalence and their trend overtime. Closed USTs are older tanks which have

minimized their threat to human health and the environment, particularly groundwater. Closing of an UST involves removing it from the ground or leaving it in the ground. Either way, the tank must be drained and cleaned by removing all liquids, dangerous vapor levels, and accumulated sludge. This is a very dangerous process which must be carried out by a trained professional. If an UST is left on the ground, it must be filled with a safe, chemically inactive solid, such as sand.

The following chart reveals the cumulative number of active and closed underground storage tanks on Native American lands.

- From 1995 to 2001 the number of active USTs has significantly declined, while the number of closed USTs has continued to substantially increase.



Source: Chart derived from Corrective Action Measures data as archived by the EPA Office of Underground Storage Tanks.

Scale: Data are comparable on a national level.

Data Characteristics and Limitations: The data on active underground storage tanks does not include all petroleum tanks, it only includes the cumulative number of active petroleum UST systems registered with the State and regulated under Subtitle I of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act. It does not include exempt or deferred UST systems. The number of closed underground storage tanks refers to the cumulative number of Subtitle I federally regulated petroleum UST systems that have been reported to the State as being closed permanently, which are either left in the ground or removed from the ground. This measure does not include exempt or deferred UST systems, nor does it include temporary closures (Corrective Action Measures). This data is based primarily on registration forms from owners and operators who have to register their tanks by law. Each EPA regional office is responsible for the data for their respective region. Although the data are collected cumulatively, the EPA allows tribal regions to make ongoing corrections to their data to account for errors such as overcounting. This will have a substantial effect on any given one year analysis. For this reason, it is best to focus on the overall trend, over time.

References

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