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Developing a Generic Survey

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Over the last 30 years, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has conducted business surveys of numerous industrial sectors. These surveys have collected economic and technical information used to develop regulations for industrial water pollution control. For each industry, EPA has designed unique sampling plans and questionnaires by evaluating factors such as production processes, typical wastewater treatment, and business practices. This development phase is extremely time-consuming. This presentation will describe our efforts to develop a generic screener questionnaire that can be quickly tailored to different industries. These screeners would be used to obtain a broad overview of an industry and to better identify the target population for a more detailed questionnaire. While industries have common elements, the terms used by each can be different, and thus, we will need to confer with other EPA staff and industry representatives to develop questions that will be relevant to multiple industries, while still providing information that can be used in the regulatory process. In addition, the level of sophistication varies from industry to industry, and sometimes within an industry. We will explore possible solutions, such as the feasibility of telephone interviews, rather than mail surveys, because this mode might allow us to better tailor the questions to the respondent, and reduce the rate of nonresponse.