

No one knows if regulation makes the Netherlands chemical industry safer

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The government spends millions regulating companies that work with large quantities of hazardous substances. But we don't know whether this is making the industry safer. The number of violations and incidents remains constant. This is the conclusion of external Ph.D. candidate Rob in 't Veld in his dissertation. He will defend his Ph.D. on 30 March.

Around 400 companies in the Netherlands work with such large quantities of hazardous substances that they could cause a major accident. They must follow the [safety measures](#) from the Major Accident (Risks) Decree (Brzo) to protect their [employees](#), [local](#)

[residents](#) and the environment as much as possible. Reports from [government regulators](#) show that each year an average of 60 percent of Brzo companies are found to be in violation of laws and regulations. "And the figures are not improving," says In 't Veld.

Same thing year in year out

In 't Veld analyzed reports from regulators (from 2010 to 2021) and interviewed their employees. His most striking conclusion is that nobody knows whether the regulation actually yields results. "Each year people dutifully report on how many inspections have been carried out, how many violations there have been and how often enforcement has taken place. The problem is that violations are discovered again a year later and the year after that too. It's the same thing year in year out. Research also shows that the causes have been the same for years. I predict that the regulators can carry on like this for another 20 years and nothing will have changed."

Disrupt society

In 't Veld thinks that government should look more closely at what is being achieved with policy, [regulation](#) and enforcement. This will give it much more insight into what measures will help make the industry safer. And that is important, he emphasizes. "There aren't major incidents at Brzo companies all that often, but when something does go wrong it can disrupt society."

Provided by Leiden University

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