Talking Points for Chemical Releases
Talking points and message maps for local health professionals

If you are approached by the media regarding a reported chemical release in your jurisdiction, the following talking points may be used. Start with message A1 or A2, then follow the instructions within that box.

A1
We were notified by the medical examiner/coroner about a fatality possibly due to a chemical release. Our condolences go out to the family.

Go to message B1 or B2.

A2
We have not been notified of any recent fatalities linked to the chemical release.

Go to message C.

B1
Out of respect for the family, we are unable to share any details.

Go to message C.

B2
On [insert date], a [gender] [“____ years old” or “between the ages of ____ and ____”] died during the chemical release.

Go to message C.

C
Chemical releases can be hazardous and fatal. People should remain safe by:

a. Reporting chemical spills to local officials.

b. Listening to local officials for orders to shelter in place or evacuate.

c. Avoiding contamination zones and remaining upwind of any spills.

For more information, visit [insert relevant website].
MESSAGE MAPS ABOUT CHEMICAL RELEASE SAFETY

Message mapping is one of the most important risk communication tools that public health agencies can employ. The goal of a message map is to convey important information in a concise and easy-to-understand fashion.

General Guidelines for Completing a Message Map

- Stick to three key messages or one key message with three parts for each underlying concern or specific question.
- Keep key messages brief. The reader should ideally spend less than 10 seconds per line.
- Develop messages that are easily understood by the target audience. (For communications with the general public, use a 6th to 8th grade readability level.)
- Place messages within a message set. The most important messages should occupy the first and last positions.
- Develop key messages that cite credible third parties.
- Use graphics and other visual aids to enhance key messages.
- Keep a positive tone. Messages should be solution oriented and constructive. Try to balance negative messages with positive ones.
- Avoid unnecessary use of “absolute” words, such as no, not, never, nothing, and none.16
The following is a message map that could be used when addressing the general public about chemical release safety.

**Main Message**
“Since [November/December/January/February], there have been ____ chemical releases in Wisconsin. To help you and your loved ones stay safe...”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Messages</th>
<th>Supporting Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Three key messages</em></td>
<td><em>Three pieces of supporting information for each key message</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Message 1**
Shelter in place when ordered.

- **Supporting Info 1**
  When sheltering in place is ordered, it is safer to stay inside. If you are not in a building, immediately find the closest shelter and stay inside.

- **Supporting Info 2**
  Prevent chemicals from entering your shelter in place location by sealing all vents, doors, and windows with plastic and tape.

- **Supporting Info 3**
  Watch the TV and listen to the radio for updates. Do not leave your location until authorities give the “okay.”

**Message 2**
Evacuate when ordered.

- **Supporting Info 1**
  If authorities order an evacuation, move quickly and follow recommended routes out of your community.

- **Supporting Info 2**
  Have an emergency disaster kit in your home and car to ensure a speedy evacuation.

- **Supporting Info 3**
  Form and practice an evacuation plan with your family.

**Message 3**
Report chemical releases.

- **Supporting Info 1**
  If a chemical is released on your property or at work, call the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources for assistance.

- **Supporting Info 2**
  Call a medical professional if you come in contact with an unknown or hazardous chemical.

- **Supporting Info 3**
  Contain the release, if possible.