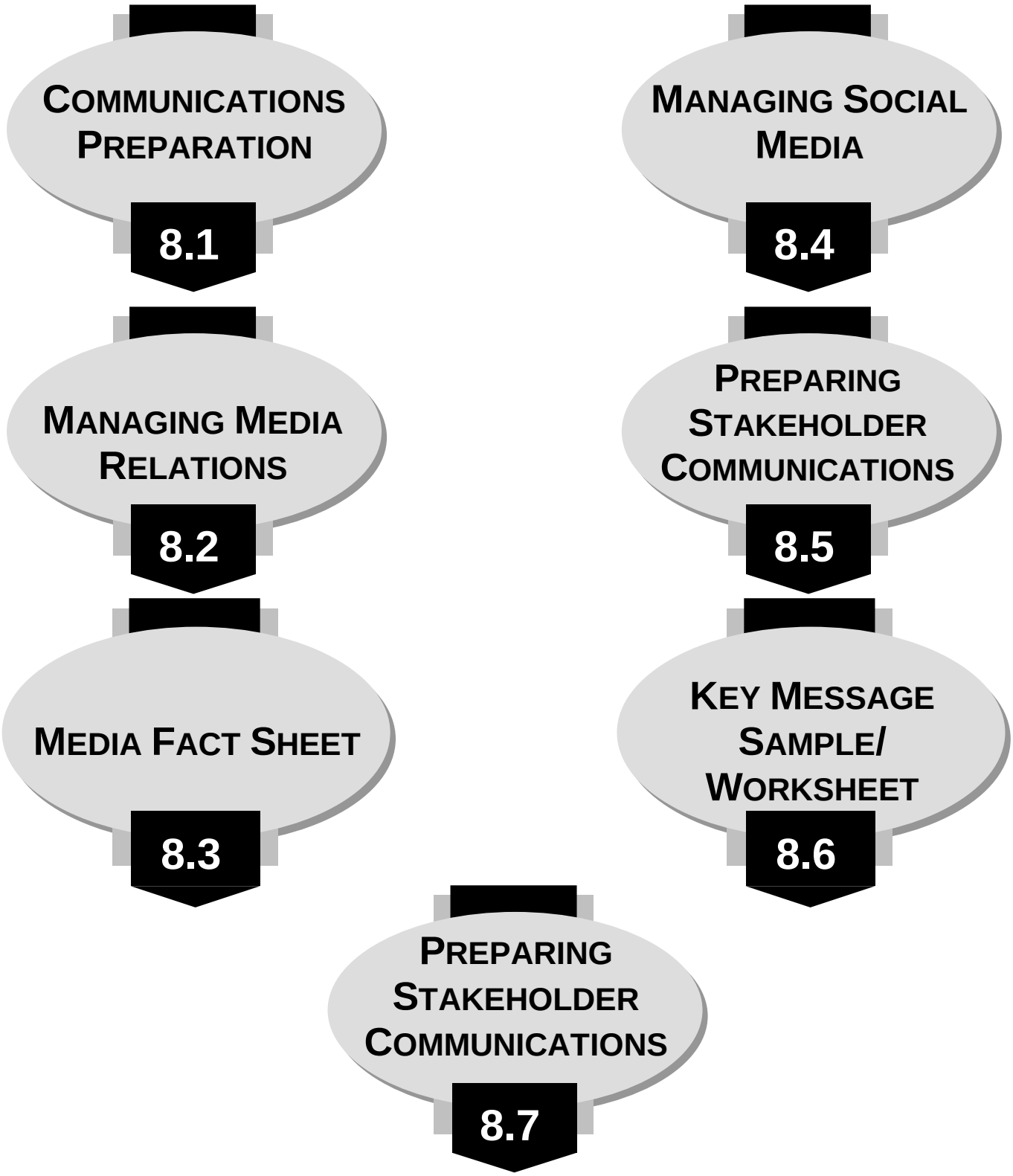
OIL SPILL CONTINGENCY MANUAL

SECTION 8

PUBLIC RELATIONS CHECKLIST

Public Relations Checklist



COMMUNICATIONS PREPARATION

8.1

Action

Before an incident occurs, plan for the four "R"s: Ready, Respond, Reassurance, and Recovery.

Procedure

Ready

- ☐ Develop a crisis communications plan.
- ☐ Prepare templates for communication.
- ☐ Establish a clear approval process for communications.
- ☐ Ensure employees know who is responsible for communications during an incident.
- ☐ Get familiar with tools to monitor media and social media.

Respond

- ☐ Be ready to acknowledge the situation.
- ☐ Prepare your initial statement.
- ☐ Response immediately and quickly.
- ☐ Develop and continue to update your key messages and use your communication tools.

Reassurance

- ☐ Demonstrate your care and concern for people involved in the incident and commitment to transparency.
- ☐ Communicate about how you have prepared for and your plan to deal with a spill (i.e., trained personnel, spill preparedness, equipment readiness, prevention programs, containment and recovery, contingency planning).
- ☐ Keep communicating with relevant facts and information.
- ☐ Discuss your investigation into the incident, your action plan, and how you will share the results of the investigation.

Recovery

- ☐ Focus on what your company is doing to make things right and what you are doing to prevent future incidents.

MANAGING MEDIA RELATIONS

8.2

Action

Prepare to respond quickly to the media as they become interested in reporting on your spill.

Procedure

- ☐ Ensure that you are aware of company policy with respect to media inquiries and on-site media response.
- ☐ Remind employees about the policy and their role if approached by media.
- ☐ Pre-designate a media spokesperson (Public Information Officer).
- ☐ Utilize one official spokesperson only; ideally the person will know the area well and have credibility in the area.
- ☐ Advise the Spill Response Team regarding who will be responsible for dealing with the media and the responsibility of each member and how to respond if media personnel approach them.
- ☐ Ensure that the Public Information Officer is fully briefed at regular intervals with respect to the status of the spill with the following questions:
  - Who does the spill affect or could it affect?
  - Was anyone hurt?
  - What happened?
  - When were you first made aware of the situation?
  - Where did it occur?
  - Why did it happen?
  - How is the problem being resolved?
- ☐ Prepare a plan for receiving media on-site (meeting location, parking arrangements, personal protective equipment, areas of spill that can be safely visited, and news media fact sheet).

TIP **Before an incident occurs, make sure you have an up-to-date media policy and plan in place.**

Action

Respond to media questions in an effective manner.

Procedure

- ☐ Ensure the first message that is delivered indicates care and concern for people affected by the spill.
- ☐ Be honest (if you don't have the answers, respond "We don't know yet").
- ☐ Be available at reasonable request.
- ☐ Listen carefully to questions and don't answer more than asked.
- ☐ Politely disagree if questions contain false accusations and calmly set the record straight.
- ☐ Avoid hypothetical questions.
- ☐ Have the media representative clarify vague questions.
- ☐ Answer only one question at a time and keep answers short.
- ☐ Never say "no comment".
- ☐ Use positive statements whenever possible about how you are prepared for and plan to deal with the spill.
- ☐ Portray a positive, concerned, professional appearance.
- ☐ Be aware of your surroundings during an interview (i.e., what is behind you, noise levels, people in the background) and move locations if necessary.
- ☐ Give a brief and positive summary at the end of the question period.
- ☐ Develop a documentation strategy (i.e., record of who was on-site, contact phone numbers, questions and concerns, and follow-up.

TIP **Before an incident occurs, make sure you have an up-to-date media policy and plan in place.**

MEDIA FACT SHEET

8.3

Action

Develop a spill preliminary statement (news media fact sheet).

Procedure

☐ Use W5 and 2 H's in the preliminary statement format (see Section 8.2).

- Who – Responsible company, who discovered it.
- What – Spilled material, approximate volume (if known), effects of spilled material on people, property, and environment.
- When – When the spill occurred, was discovered.
- Where – Where the spill originated, where it has migrated to, size of spill.
- Why – Spill cause.
- How – Safety measures, containment and recovery operations, monitoring, clean-up, and debris.
- Housekeeping – Contact name and number of Public Information Officer, arrangements for media.
- Include expression of care and concern for the safety of your workers, contractors, and the public.

☐ Avoid including the following issues in a preliminary statement:

- Names of fatalities or injured people.
- Liability issues.
- Anything that is not factual or is a guess (i.e., spill volumes, time required to clean-up, clean-up costs, etc.).

See section 8.6 Key Messages / Worksheets for samples.

MANAGING SOCIAL MEDIA

8.4

Action

Change your social media messaging to incident communications.

Procedure

☐ If your company does not have or actively use its social media pages (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn) to communicate, an incident is not the time to launch these tools. What you can do is:

- Ensure that you are aware of company policy with respect to social media.
- Remind employees about the policy and their role if contacted via social media.
- Constantly monitor social media to stay informed on what people are saying about the incident.
- Address any misinformation or questions through your active communication channels.
- Post a brief statement on inactive social media accounts and links to where people can find more detailed and up-to-date information.
- Connect with impacted residents privately or offline.

☐ If your company actively uses social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn) to communicate to its audiences, what you can do in addition to the above is:

- Use social media to disseminate information, not engage in conversation or debate.
- Keep your social media accounts active (don't disappear or shut them down).
- Turn off scheduled social media posts.
- Change images and posts to incident updates.
- Pin updates.

- Keep messages short and factual; ensure you release the correct information even if it means a short delay to validate the information.
- Give citizens specific information such as the location of road closures.
- Share updates consistently across relevant social media channels.
- Send updates frequently.
- Share and repost updates from other trusted organizations (WCSS, emergency responders, regulator, government agencies).
- Continue to share updates even when the immediate incident has ended.

PREPARING STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATIONS

8.5

Action

Ensure stakeholders are in the communications loop (i.e., employees, investors, regulators community neighbours, local business)

Procedure

- ☐ Quickly design and implement a communications plan for all audiences.
- ☐ Ensure you include what approvals are required from whom for communicating with audiences.
- ☐ Establish a 1-800 number and corporate website link; advise all stakeholders of contact information.
- ☐ Update the home page of your website to focus on messaging about the incident and contact information.
- ☐ Send out information updates to employees.
- ☐ Post and send out media releases.
- ☐ Schedule open houses.
- ☐ Provide updates at specific meetings.
- ☐ Respond to inquiries.
- ☐ Develop and distribute internal updates.
- ☐ Organize photo / video shoots.
- ☐ Provide statistics, maps, etc.
- ☐ Maintain complete documentation of your communications.
- ☐ Be flexible, transparent, accommodating, and accessible at all times.

KEY MESSAGE SAMPLE / WORKSHEETS

8.6

PRE-HOLDING STATEMENT – Delivered verbally. To be issued by frontline staff who are on site and may be contacted before full Incident Command is set up (first few minutes of the incident if required).

"At this time, I do not have any information on the incident. As soon as there is an update, it will be posted on our website, **<insert web address>.**

If you are unable to access the internet, we will have an information hotline set up in approximately XX minutes/hours. The hotline number is 1-8XX-XXXX."

MEDIA HOLDING STATEMENT – Delivered verbally.
Note: The statement below is a guideline only. Wording of statements, news media fact sheet needs to reflect on-site conditions and descriptions provided by the Incident Commander.

At approximately **<time>** on **<date> <company name>** detected **<specifics, if applicable**> on one of the company's **<operations>** at **<location>. <Company name**> <specifics, e.g., shut down operations.>

Emergency crews have been dispatched to the site **<add details>,** to evaluate the situation and secure the area. This situation is a priority for **<company name>,** and crews are now at work containing the spill **<include additional action appropriate to the situation>.** Civic authorities and regulatory agencies have been advised, and **<company name>** is working closely with emergency officials.

Further details will be posted on the <company name> website as soon as they are available. If you are unable to access the internet the hotline number is 1-8XX-XXXX."

NEWS RELEASE – To be issues via a news wire service and posted on the company website.
Note: The statement below is a guideline only. Wording of statements, news media fact sheet needs to reflect on-site conditions and descriptions provided by the incident commander.

NEWS RELEASE SAMPLE

8.7

NEWS RELEASE – To be issued via a news wire service and posted on the company website.

NOTE **The news release below is a guideline only. Wording of statements, news media fact sheet needs to reflect on-site conditions and descriptions provided**

Incident Advisory/ News Release

(TITLE – incident description short and to the point)

<Location of head office City, Province> - **<Day, Month, Year**> At **<time>** today, **<company name>** reported that **<incident overview, location, etc.>.**

Any incident involving a spill is a concern to **<company name>** and its safe resolution is our top priority.

After securing the area, **<company name>** responded by **<describe the current response activities and actions of incident command>**. Emergency crews **<and anyone else involved>** have been dispatched and are attending to the spill. **<Company name>** has notified and is working with the appropriate regulators and emergency officials.

There have been **<x injuries/ environmental reports/ health reports/ etc. and actions taken>. <Company name>** continues to be in contact with people in the affected area.

Our immediate concern is containment and determining next steps to take. **<Company name>** will continue to **<describe actions planned in the short-term>.** We are working closely with emergency officials.

This is a preliminary advisory to be updated as further information becomes available.

<Add company boiler plate information.>

-30-
For further information, please contact:
<Company Name, Media Relations Contact>
1-8XX-XXXX
Email: **<Contact email address>**
<Investor relations contact may also be included>