

# 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.*



**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].

**A2**

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

*Go to message C.*



# 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.<sup>16</sup>

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...”

<b>Key Messages</b> <i>Three key messages</i>	<b>Supporting Information</b> <i>Three pieces of supporting information for each key message</i>
<b>Message 1</b> Shelter in place when ordered.	<b>Supporting Info 1</b> 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.  <b>Supporting Info 2</b> Prevent chemicals from entering your shelter in place location by sealing all vents, doors, and windows with plastic and tape.  <b>Supporting Info 3</b> Watch the TV and listen to the radio for updates. Do not leave your location until authorities give the “okay.”
<b>Message 2</b> Evacuate when ordered.	<b>Supporting Info 1</b> If authorities order an evacuation, move quickly and follow recommended routes out of your community.  <b>Supporting Info 2</b> Have an emergency disaster kit in your home and car to ensure a speedy evacuation.  <b>Supporting Info 3</b> Form and practice an evacuation plan with your family.
<b>Message 3</b> Report chemical releases.	<b>Supporting Info 1</b> If a chemical is released on your property or at work, call the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources for assistance.  <b>Supporting Info 2</b> Call a medical professional if you come in contact with an unknown or hazardous chemical.  <b>Supporting Info 3</b> Contain the release, if possible.



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