**Public Information Plan: [Name of Incident]**

(First 24-48 hours, then update for continuity of response)

**APPROVED BY:
Federal On-scene Coordinator**

*Signature Date*

*Name: Organization:*

**APPROVED BY:
State On-scene Coordinator-Maine**

*Signature Date*

*Name: Organization:*

**APPROVED BY:
State On-scene Coordinator-New Hampshire**

*Signature Date*

*Name: Organization:*

**APPROVED BY:
Responsible Party**

*Signature Date*

*Name: Organization:*

**Background:** The Coast Guard was notified of/responded to an incident at [\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_].

**Media Interest:** High/Medium/Low

**Command Communication Objectives:**

* Assign a Public Information Officer (PIO) and establish a Joint Information Center (JIC).
* Coordinate with the Liaison Officer (LOFR) for VIP/Political messaging and interest.
* PIO/JIC will coordinate messaging and ensure continuity of media releases between Incident Command Posts/Unified Commands (if additional commands are established).
* The Incident Command Post PIOs (Unified Command) will initiate and draft media messaging and will release it once they have received release authority from each of the Incident Commanders (ICs). As the incident response progresses, the ICs may delegate certain release authorities to the PIO.
* The Unified Command will provide actionable, proactive and preventative safety messages to the public in a timely manner with the broadest dissemination feasible.
* The Unified Command will provide timely information about response efforts and keep all stakeholders informed of containment, collection and mitigation efforts.
* The Unified Command will provide accurate and timely information about public safety and highlight spill mitigation and actions of responding agencies.
* The Unified Command will provide accurate and timely information about environmental impacts and events with potential for environmental impact.

**Communication Methods:** Information will be pushed out to the public through the Incident Command Post(s) through a combination of United States Coast Guard First District and State Public Information systems.

The volume of any estimated spill quantities (such as the potential amount of oil spilled or the amount of oil recovered) will be expressed in **gallons**. The common US date format will be used (.e.g. September 25, 2019). Time will be expressed in **12-hour notation (e.g. 9:50 am)** and the time zone will be Eastern Daylight Time.

**News Releases:** News releases should be used to update the news on the situation with accurate new information daily or as appropriate.

The Unified Command will sign off on all news releases until the authority has been granted for the PIO to release information without Unified Command approval. Once the PIO has been granted authority to release information, they should do so on behalf of the UC and should consult with representatives from each agency within the UC that is represented in the JIC prior to releasing information, whenever possible.

Press releases will be reviewed by environmental experts prior to being released, whenever possible, to ensure environmental issues are appropriately and accurately addressed.

A good news release includes involved parties, timeline info, safety measures and pertinent statistics. We will follow the schedule below regarding news release promulgation:

First news release (within 30 minutes of receiving notification of an incident, or as soon as possible):

* Basic information about the incident, as available at time of release
* UC established and responding, how to contact JIC

Second news release (within 1 hour if possible)

* **BASIC** information about the incident, updated to provide information available at time of release
* Include the makeup of the Unified Command
* Include any safety concerns that need to be conveyed to the general public, including exclusion and safety zones (if applicable)
* Include information about public safety and recommended public protection/safety measures. Air/water monitoring information and recommended evaluations should be included (if applicable)
* Include information about hotline for reporting wildlife impacts. Report that Federal, state and local wildlife officials are responding and members of the public should not approach or touch impacted wildlife.
* Include a phone number, or email for the JIC and operating hours per operational period
* Include links to Twitter sites and information websites (if applicable)
* The public will want to know how much product has been released. Once available, initial quantity information should be based on the capacity (in gallons) of the tank or tanks potentially impacted. If there is a legitimate possibility that the entire vessel could capsize or sink (leading to the loss of all oil on board), than the total volume of all oil tanks aboard the vessel should also be provided. The Responsible Party should provide the Unified Command with information on the best estimate of the volume of oil in the impacted tank(s) prior to the release and the basis of this estimate. The Responsible Party should also provide an estimate of remaining oil in the tank(s) (when it becomes available) as well as the basis of this estimate.

An initial Coast Guard press release and initial Unified Command press release is shown below:

**Initial Coast Guard Press Release:**

***Sector Northern New England***

South Portland, Maine



Release Date: 09/18/19

Public Affairs Officer: 207-347-5015

24hr Command Center: 207-767-0303

News Release

**Coast Guard responds to [Incident Type] at [Facility/Vessel Name] in [City], [State]**

[CITY], [State] – At approximately XX:XXPM on Month Day, Year, [Responsible Party] notified the U.S. Coast Guard of a rupture to a holding tank located at the [facility]. The containment failure was reported to be caused by significant rain and wind events over the last week. Oil was released onto the ground and has been observed impacting the river. The amount of oil lost is unknown at this time but is considered significant.

Federal, state, and local agencies are responding to the oil spill deploying boom around the source area. Multiple contractors are responding to the staging area to make preparations to deploy more boom. No injuries have been reported at this time.

A Unified Command has been established consisting of the United States Coast Guard, New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, Maine Department of Environmental Protection, [Responsible Party] and local officials.

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**Initial Unified Command Press Release:**

News Release

**Unified Command responds to tank rupture at [Vessel/Facility Name] in [City], [State]**

[CITY], [State] – At approximately XX:XPM on [Month day, year], [Responsible Party] reported to the U.S. Coast Guard of a rupture to a holding tank located at the [vessel/facility], located at [city, state] The containment failure was reported to be caused by significant rain and wind events over the last week. Oil was released onto the ground and has been observed impacting the river. The amount of oil lost is unknown at this time but is considered significant.

Federal, state, and local agencies are responding to the oil spill deploying boom around the source area. Multiple contractors are responding to the staging area to make preparations to deploy more boom. No injuries have been reported at this time.

A Unified Command has been established consisting of Coast Guard, New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, Maine Department of Environmental Protection, [Responsible Party] and local officials.

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**Social Media:** Due to space limitations, short, concise posts will be saved for Twitter, referencing a URL for press releases and/or FB page for longer updates*.* Social Media is used to communicate directly to the community and will not be used if low community outrage or interest persists. Information posted to the incident website and social media outlets (e.g. Twitter & Facebook) will require approval from senior PIO/JIC representatives from the agencies who have an Incident Commander in the Unified Command. PIO/JIC representatives will need to seek approval to utilize previously conveyed information from press releases. The following guidelines will be employed:

Twitter

Include UC-approved #[hashtag] to initiate conversation and track public comments.

* Initial tweet about the incident
* Establishment of UC, link to first release, hashtag
* Continue with basic facts, #hashtag
* Evacuation zone (as applicable)
* Safety/Exclusion zone (as applicable)

Facebook

* Announce establishment of Unified Command and response
* Direct followers to Twitter and response website URL (if applicable)

**Press Conference**: Press conferences will be used for announcing new or significant changes, as well as a means to provide UC visuals for authority presence in media reporting*.*

**Recommendations:**

* Timely imagery, press releases, on camera interviews and news conferences will help keep the public informed and satisfied. Thought should be given to ensuring appropriate backdrops for press conferences and camera interviews; to include ongoing clean-up operations if it can be provided from a safe distance.
* The media should be invited to view operations from a safe distance if operational assets can be provided (media availabilities).
* Coordinate messaging with other agencies represented in the Joint Information Center to create specific stakeholder messaging and maintain consistency.
* Talking points and command messages for the response should be generated and distributed to spokespersons.
* The Unified Command should be made available for media interviews, putting trusted subject matter experts in key places to handle the basic questions the news may have.

**Analysis:** Analysis of the media and public response to the above tactics is crucial to the success of our information objectives will be ongoing throughout [incident]. Television and print pieces, as well as web content to include news sites, blogs and social media traffic will be reviewed for stories regarding the Unified Command and the response.

When compiling information for analysis, we will consider the following:

* Look for rumors and themes in media response.
* Are the UC messages being used by media/public?
* Are media/public using the UC as a source?
* Are media/public getting the story right?
* Who is getting the message?

Only through analyzing the news and social media will the Unified Command be able to fine-tune messages and delivery methods to better address and inform the public. Careful scrutiny should be placed on messaging to ensure that the public is receiving as much information as possible to make informed decisions about the operations performed.

**Internal Response**: Press releases and pertinent news clips should be provided to the Situation Unit Leader (SITL) or displayed in an appropriate gathering area of the ICP to keep internal responders informed of current news coverage and public perception of the response operations. The PIO will provide guidance for public information concerns for responders through the meeting schedule and the 204 as appropriate.

**Sensitive Information Plan**: Personnel are to make no comments regarding [incident] or response beyond very basic factual information. All requests for media shall be referred to the JIC/PIO.

 Area Command JIC: xxx-xxx-xxxx

 US JIC (as appropriate): xxx-xxx-xxxx

 (International JICs, if employed: xxxxxxxx)

 Social Media: @USCGNortheast, @USCGTristate

Responders will be issued a media card with a standardized response and contact information. A sample media card is shown below:

The Canadian and US Coast Guard, along with our port partners, are working hard to respond to this oil spill. For specific information please contact our joint information center.

US JIC 207-347-5021

 Canadian JIC/PIO 506-657-8561

 Area Command JIC 506-529-8346

Social Media: @USCGNortheast, @CoastGuardCan

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