



# Practical Guidelines: Sharing Information with Law Enforcement



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## 1 INTRODUCTION

A vital step towards effective intelligence-led policing of environmental crime is the regular exchange of information between all concerned parties. Potential sources of information related to environmental crimes include various law enforcement authorities, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's), Civil Society Organization (CSO's), and Inter-Governmental Organizations (IGO's) and members of the public. Law enforcement often relies upon information from these sources to supplement existing intelligence, alert them to crimes, criminals and emerging trends and provide new lines of investigative enquiry.

These Guidelines are meant for all members of the public, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's), Civil Society Organization (CSO's), and Inter-Governmental Organizations (IGO's), in order to gain knowledge about how they can share information, especially sensitive criminal information, with law enforcement agencies. It aims to help all parties to overcome some of the challenges encountered when sharing information by clearly and simply describing what types of information you should provide to law enforcement, to whom you should provide it, how to do so, and what response you can expect.

Your decision to share information with law enforcement is, in large part, dependent upon your confidence that a law enforcement response will follow. By following these Guidelines, you can increase the likelihood that the information you provide will result in effective law enforcement action. This provides a genuine opportunity for you to make a tangible contribution to protecting the environment from criminal exploitation.

To facilitate the sharing of information with law enforcement concerning environmental crime, INTERPOL has developed a revised version of the original 'Ecomessage' form. A copy of the form is included in the Appendix of these Guidelines for your use.

## 2 PROVIDING THE RIGHT INFORMATION

Law enforcement agencies act upon information concerning:

- A breach of law
- An alleged breach of law
- The protection of life and property;
- The preservation of order;
- The prevention of criminal offences;
- Bringing offenders to justice; and
- A duty or responsibility arising from law.

When providing information to law enforcement, you should ensure that it relates to one of these areas.

### 2.1 INTERPOL Ecomessage form

INTERPOL promotes the use of the 'Ecomessage' form for information sharing on environmental crime. The Ecomessage is the recommended form for providing information to INTERPOL about environmental crimes and the criminals involved. These Guidelines encourage and facilitate the collection of detailed and relevant information in a standardized format.

INTERPOL has created a specific version of the Ecomessage to be used by members of the public, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's), Civil Society Organization (CSO's), and Inter-Governmental Organizations (IGO's) (available in the Appendix of these Guidelines).

Using the Ecomessage ensures that all information that may be available to the source and useful for law enforcement authorities in each country, is shared in a systematic and organized manner. This also allows criminal intelligence analysts to study the data and identify the structure, extent and dynamics of international criminals and organizations involved. It also allows for easy cross-referencing between different Ecomessages.

The Ecomessage and instructions for its completion can also be found at <https://www.interpol.int/Crime-areas/Environmental-crime/Report-an-environmental-crime>.

## 2.2 Examples of useful information

Examples of the types of information you should provide include:

- Information about environmental crimes, or incidents related to environmental crimes, such as poaching of elephants for ivory, a seizure of tiger skins, illegal importation or exportation of unlawfully harvested fish, illegal logging or trafficking in protected timber species or illegal disposal of hazardous material;
- Information about people involved in environmental crimes including criminals, their associates, and criminal groups or organizations;
- Communications information related to people involved in environmental crimes, such as telephone numbers, website addresses and other media used to communicate or trade illicit commodities;
- Information about vehicles used in the commission of environmental crimes, such as trucks used to smuggle commodities across borders, shipping containers used to transport items or vessels involved in illegal fisheries activity;
- Financial information, such as bank account details or information about offshore holdings used to conceal or launder assets resulting from environmental crimes;
- Information about specific methods being used to commit criminal acts, including corruption, technical tools or ownership of weapons; and
- Addresses or locations associated with criminal activities, such as warehouses used to store rhino horns, shops illegally selling medicines made from animal parts, or shipping companies involved in the movement of illicit goods.

When providing information to law enforcement, consider submitting supporting items that corroborate the information you are providing, such as photographs, documentation of postal transactions or internet communications. This will help law enforcement agencies to assess the value of the information.

*The information you provide should be as detailed as possible. Whenever possible, it should include where and when the crime(s) occurred, details of the suspect(s), victim(s) and witnesses(s), the method used to commit the crime, what commodities are involved and why the crime was committed.*

### 3 PROVIDING HIGH QUALITY INFORMATION

Not all information is of equal value to law enforcement. The information that you provide is more likely to be actioned if it is of a high quality. High quality information is:

- Relevant to a policing purpose;
- Specific in its subject matter;
- Detailed in its content;
- Complete, or with few information gaps;
- Accurate, or supported by sound evidence;
- Timely, if it relates to an impending event; and
- Lawfully collected.

**Information must always be obtained in accordance with the relevant national laws**

Make every effort to ensure that the information you provide exhibits these characteristics to the greatest extent possible. Do not edit out information which you think is unimportant. Something that seems irrelevant or insignificant to you may be highly relevant or significant to a law enforcement investigation.

In addition, conduct a basic assessment of the information before you share it with law enforcement. A basic principle of information evaluation is that the source of the information and the information itself should be assessed independently. The reason for this is that a trustworthy source may provide false information and an untrustworthy source may provide accurate information. Your assessment should consider both the reliability of the source and the information.

#### 3.1 How *reliable* is the source?

Consider the following questions to help you assess the reliability of the source of the information:

- Did you collect the information yourself or does it originate from a third party?
- Is the source identified or anonymous?
- Have you received information from this source before and, if so, how accurate was it?
- Is the source technical or human? Technical sources include CCTV footage, biometric scanning or forensic data
- What is the motivation of the source in providing the information?
- Was the information collected legally?

### **3.2 How *reliable* is the information?**

Consider the following questions to help you assess the reliability of the information supplied by the source:

- Is the information known personally to the source and the person reporting it?
- Is the information known personally only to the source but not to the person reporting it?
- Is the information based on rumor, personal opinion or hearsay?
- Has the information been corroborated by other, independent sources?
- How specific, detailed and complete is the information?
- Under what circumstances was the information collected?
- Is there any reason to doubt the reliability of the information?

### **3.3 Provide all information to Law Enforcement**

In order to effectively action the information, law enforcement needs to understand the origin of the information you have provided and the manner and circumstances in which it was collected. To facilitate this understanding, provide your assessment of the source and the information to law enforcement along with the information itself. Be prepared for law enforcement to contact you with relevant questions.

Do not withhold information because you think it is unreliable. Share it with local law enforcement and allow them to make the decision. They may be in possession of corroborating information of which you are unaware.

It is in your interests to provide law enforcement with the highest quality information possible. This will ensure that your information has the greatest chance of being actioned and, over time, it will improve law enforcement's confidence in you as a source of valuable information.

## **4 TO WHOM YOU SHOULD PROVIDE INFORMATION**

All information related to environmental crime should be provided to your relevant local or national police force or other investigating authority. You are recommended to restrict the dissemination of such information to law enforcement and not disseminate it widely as this may adversely affect potential law enforcement action.

### **4.1 Is your information of national or transnational concern?**

The information will be stored, disseminated and dealt with differently depending on whether it is of national concern only or whether it has a transnational dimension:

- Information that is only of concern to the country in which it occurred will remain with the local or national police force or investigating agency
- Information that is in some way transnational (e.g. because it involves the movement of a commodity or of suspects across international borders) should be passed from the local or national police force to INTERPOL.

When providing information, whenever possible provide your contact details so that the law enforcement agency can contact you if they require clarification or further information.

Finally, ensure that you are not committing an offence by providing the information. Some national laws prohibit the dissemination of information about certain topics and categories of individual (such as Royalty or the political leadership), or information which may be considered slanderous. It is your responsibility to make yourself aware of the laws and regulations governing information collection and information sharing in your jurisdiction, and to respect these laws and regulations.

### **4.2 Providing information to CrimeStoppers**

If you need to provide information anonymously, INTERPOL has partnered with Crime Stoppers International (CSI) to provide a web-based mechanism for the general public to provide anonymous and confidential tips on environmental crime issues. The online reporting form can be found at:

<http://csiworld.org/2015/08/environmental-crimes/>

The information received by CSI will be assessed to determine its relevance to INTERPOL. This information will be forwarded to INTERPOL for further analysis and to determine the best

course of action. This may include sharing it with relevant law enforcement agencies in the countries concerned.

**Only information provided through national law enforcement channels can be recorded on INTERPOL's global databases**

## 5 WHAT FEEDBACK YOU CAN EXPECT TO RECEIVE

The feedback you receive will most likely relate to:

- The usefulness of the information you provided;
- Requests for clarification or further information;
- Whether the information you provided is likely to be used in court proceedings; and
- The outcome of the investigation concerned.

Do not expect to receive immediate feedback. Feedback may be delayed by on-going operations and court proceedings. Even then, you will not receive feedback if providing this feedback will compromise future law enforcement action, or reveal sensitive sources or intelligence gathering methods. However, in some cases, a law enforcement agency may decide after considering all the risks involved that some items of information can be shared with you, in order to generate further information.

Do not expect to receive feedback about how the information you provided relates to other intelligence held by law enforcement authorities. This is confidential information disclosure of which may breach national laws, jeopardise the safety of individuals or compromise law enforcement activities. Law enforcement authorities have a duty of care to the communities they serve, and this includes safeguarding the information they hold and those impacted by this information. Most are bound by national legislation which restricts the disclosure of certain types of information to third parties.

It is possible that the information you provided cannot be used by law enforcement because of the way in which it was collected. In most countries, law enforcement agencies are governed by strict laws controlling how they can obtain, store and use information and prescribing standards of evidence. These laws may not apply to non-law enforcement personnel meaning that you may have collected information which, while valuable for criminal intelligence purposes, may nevertheless be inadmissible in court proceedings.

Bear in mind that a law enforcement agency is unlikely to share feedback with those who are likely to inappropriately publicise that feedback. INTERPOL recognises that there is a legitimate need for some non-law enforcement organisations to publicise their activities, for

example to generate public interest and donor funds. However, this should not be done at the expense of law enforcement activity or the safety of individuals.

**Any strategies concerning public awareness campaigns or other media engagements necessitating public disclosure of law enforcement information (including use of social media) should be shared and discussed with the relevant law enforcement agency before any information is disclosed. While a timely, targeted and coordinated media campaign can be a valuable operational tactic, the premature public disclosure of information can jeopardise months or even years of investigative work.**

The level of feedback that you receive from law enforcement will differ according to the agency and the country. Some agencies may provide regular feedback; others may provide no feedback at all. While feedback from law enforcement is encouraged, law enforcement agencies are not obliged to provide it and, as described, are often restricted from doing so.

## 6 APPENDIX: ECOMESSAGE TEMPLATE

### ECOMESSAGE

THIS INFORMATION WILL BE SHARED WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITIES UNLESS OTHERWISE REQUESTED

Please attach copies of supporting paperwork and photographs

*Fields in red italics are useful if a law enforcement action is to be initiated*

#### 1. Subject

- 1.1. Brief description of the crime
- 1.2. Your Reference
- 1.3. Legal description of the crime: citation of legislation violated and legally possible penalties
- 1.4. Your contact details

#### 1. Subject

- 1.1*
- 1.2
- 1.3
- 1.4

#### 2. Place and method of discovery

- 2.1. Place where the crime was discovered. If at sea or on open countryside note distance and direction to a reference point
- 2.2. City, Country, Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) or Sea
- 2.3. Latitude and longitude
- 2.4. How the crime was discovered

#### 2. Place and method of discovery

- 2.1*
- 2.2*
- 2.3
- 2.4*

#### 3. Date and time

- 3.1. Date and time when the crime was discovered
- 3.2. Date and time when the crime was committed (if different from 3.1)

#### 3. Date and time

- 3.1*
- 3.2

#### 4. Identity of person(s) involved

Note: Section 4 must be completed for each person involved

- 4.1. Family name (& maiden name)
- 4.2. First name(s)
- 4.3. Sex
- 4.4. Alias(es)
- 4.5. Date of birth
- 4.6. Place of birth
- 4.7. Nationality
- 4.8. Address
- 4.9. Telephone number
- 4.10. Email
- 4.11. Information contained on passport or national ID - Include numbers, place & date of issue, period of validity
- 4.12. Profession
- 4.13. Bank account/credit card number(s)
- 4.14. Role in the offence e.g. courier, dealer, etc.
- 4.15. Role in any company mentioned in item 6
- 4.16. Additional information about the person e.g. links to other criminals or crimes

#### 4. Identity of person(s) involved

Note: Section 4 must be completed for each person involved

- 4.1*
- 4.2
- 4.3
- 4.5*
- 4.6*
- 4.7
- 4.8
- 4.9
- 4.10
- 4.11

#### 5. Companies involved

Note: Section 5 must be completed for each business involved

- 5.1. Type: Legal type of company
- 5.2. Name: Legal name and any trade names
- 5.3. Activities
- 5.4. Address and telecommunications details of headquarters
- 5.5. Registration number
- 5.6. Business address and phone/fax — If different to 6.4
- 5.7. Bank account/credit card number(s)
- 5.8. Additional information about the company e.g. links to

#### 5. Companies involved

Note: Section 5 must be completed for each business involved

- 5.1
- 5.2
- 5.3
- 5.4
- 5.5
- 5.6
- 5.7
- 5.8

**6. Means of transport**

6.1 **Type of transport** used in the commission of the crime. Include if seized

**7. Vessel**

- 7.1. Type of vessel, history, recent and previous flag state)
- 7.2. Has the vessel been blacklisted? If so, when and with which international Regional Fishing Monitoring Organization
- 7.3. IMO number
- 7.4. MMSI number
- 7.5. Hull number
- 7.6. Owner details including name, address and nationality
- 7.7. Flag state, registration document or number
- 7.8. Catch logbook number
- 7.9. Cargo manifest(s) or bill of lading
- 7.10. Is there a radio transmission logbook
- 7.11. Is there an engine logbook
- 7.12. Does the vessel have any country licenses for fishing in EEZ
- 7.13. Does the vessel have any quotas on species in EEZ

**8. Locations and routes**

- 8.1. Country and town/port of origin
- 8.2. Country of provenance: Country of last re-export
- 8.3. Country/countries of transit
- 8.4. Country and address of destination: destination declared on transport documents and the real destination, if different.

**9. Modus operandi**

9.1 Describe the method used to commit the crime including concealment method, use of weapons, falsified documents, equipment and financial instruments. Note links to other cases

**10. Identification of documents used**

10.1 **Types of documents**, including authorizations, transport documents, invoices, etc. Specify if altered or fraudulent

**11. Additional information**

11.1 Other relevant information not covered elsewhere

**12. Evaluation**

12.1 Is the source of the information:

(A) always reliable	(B) sometimes reliable	(C) unreliable	(X) untested
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14.2 Is the information:

(1) known to be true	(2) known to the source but not the person reporting	(3) not known to the source but corroborated	(4) not known to the source and cannot be corroborated
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**6. Means of transport**

6.1

**7. Vessel**

- 7.1
- 7.2
- 7.3
- 7.4
- 7.5
- 7.6
- 7.7
- 7.8
- 7.9
- 7.10
- 7.11
- 7.12
- 7.13

**8. Locations and routes**

- 8.1
- 8.2
- 8.3
- 8.4

**9. Modus operandi**

9.1

**10. Identification of documents used**

10.1

**11. Additional information**

11.1

**12. Evaluation**

12.1 Put an 'x' in the correct box

14.2 Put and 'x' in the correct box



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