



INTERPOL

PUBLIC MESSAGES TO USE
IN THE IMMEDIATE RESPONSE
TO A **CBRN ATTACK**



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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** A CBRN attack is one of the most challenging incidents that emergency services will ever deal with and will attract a high level of public and media interest within a very short space of time. Responding to the demand for information while simultaneously ensuring public safety and dealing effectively with the incident can place considerable demands on services. During the first hours of a CBRN terrorist attack, police services are usually the lead responders, and therefore it will be a police duty to ensure the public are adequately informed and protected from harm. They must be able to deliver and disseminate accurate information quickly and effectively in order to save the lives of those affected, or who may become affected.
- 1.2** There is not enough time immediately after an attack to engage in detailed consultation with emergency service partners, health agencies or scientists to construct specific messages appropriate to the actual substance released; it could take several hours before such detailed information is available. This document is therefore designed to provide pre-prepared messages which can be communicated to the public in the first minutes and hours of a CBRN event, prior to the setting up of full command and control structures.
- 1.3** The information in the pre-prepared messages is, by necessity, generic. The messages aim to provide as much advice as possible in the absence of details on the nature of the attack, numbers of casualties, contaminant used, health effects or extent of any atmospheric plume or environmental impact. Such information will only become clear at later stages of the event. However, from assessment of casualties' symptoms, the activation of detectors, or through intelligence, it should be possible to tell if the substance is chemical, biological or radioactive in nature. This information will then inform the type of message to be disseminated.
- 1.4** The intention of the messages is to save life, prevent panic and provide public reassurance. The messages should also prevent the public from overwhelming medical services unnecessarily. The messages provide valuable information to the public to enhance their safety by advising them what they can do to protect themselves and others, and direct them to where they can obtain treatment or further information.
- 1.5** The pre-prepared messages should be viewed as templates that can be adapted as appropriate to circumstances. Not all the sample messages need to be communicated to the public, but used as required.

2. HOW AND WHEN TO USE THESE MESSAGES

- 2.1 The pre-prepared messages should be considered for release to the public as soon as possible following a potential CBRN incident.
- 2.2 The pre-prepared messages are designed to be given directly to media outlets, including television and local radio networks, or dissemination through other channels such as online communications and social media. They are not designed to be delivered by the first responders directly to the public in a face-to-face manner, e.g. to get the public to comply with police instructions regarding cordon lines, at scene decontamination or property management. Such messages require an awareness of the immediate situation prevailing at the scene and are not within the scope of this document.
- 2.3 These generic messages should be replaced by clear scientific advice once this becomes available through the investigative process.
- 2.4 The messages are for use only after a suspected CBRN event has occurred. This document does not include messages designed to be delivered to the public or the media to increase their preparedness prior to a CBRN event occurring.
- 2.5 Messages for an attack that only becomes apparent several hours or days after a covert release (such as a biological agent) are also beyond the scope of this document, as the effects will be substantially different and there will be more time to provide accurate detailed information to the public from health protection agencies.
- 2.6 Messages have been prepared primarily for C, B and R type incidents. Specific messages have not been prepared for a nuclear explosion (N) event. The messages for a biological release are designed for a small-scale release, e.g. resulting from the opening of a letter containing anthrax spores, rather than for a wide-scale or covert dispersion of a biological agent.
- 2.7 The messages are designed to be generic enough to use in any circumstances, whether the incident is terrorist or accidental in nature. However, in accidental releases from industrial sites, laboratories or transport accidents, information on what has been released is usually available very quickly. Such information will come from the site, Hazardous Chemical (HAZCHEM) markings on vehicles, employees, drivers, etc. Therefore specific advice can be given early on, which is not usually the case in a malicious CBRN incident where the exact nature of the substance will be unknown.

3. TARGET AUDIENCE

- 3.1 The target audiences for the messages will be primarily those members of the public affected within the contaminated area, but also include messages to those close to the affected area and those who are not affected but are concerned about the wider implications. Messages for a wider international audience are outside the scope of this document.
- 3.2 Messages can be tailored for specific groups, e.g. vulnerable people, schools, businesses and contaminated casualties. The messages are primarily for police use during the emergency response phase but may be amended for delivery by different stakeholders, such as local authorities or health services.

4. OVERARCHING COMMUNICATION PROTOCOLS

- 4.1 This guidance should sit under your country's existing multi-agency communication strategies. The pre-prepared messages should be incorporated into existing communication plans in order that they are readily available for use. The guidance is designed to complement and assist the development of existing plans by highlighting the key communication considerations when responding to this type of attack.
- 4.2 If your country has existing CBRN emergency response plans, the messages may be used as an appendix to such documents.
- 4.3 The decision as to which communication channels to use during an incident will depend on the circumstances and should be agreed by the major decision makers such as the Strategic Commander and Media Lead or Communications Officer.
- 4.4 The Tactical Media Lead or Communications Officer will advise on the content of subsequent communications about the emergency as a whole.

5. INITIAL HOLDING STATEMENT

- 5.1 An initial holding statement is the first public communication to be released. This is a key operational decision and its content should be agreed with the senior officer in charge of the incident.
- 5.2 Many Major Incident and CBRN Emergency Plans will have holding statements for delivery to the public. The holding statement should be followed up as soon as possible with the pre-prepared messages detailed within the appendices.

An example of a holding statement:

We can confirm that an incident has taken place in [area] around [time] today.

- It is too early to say what has happened, but early indications are that there may be a risk to the public. The public are asked to stay away from the area. Emergency services are dealing with the incident and further advice will be issued as soon as more information is available.
- The emergency services have planned and exercised together for incidents like this and we are well prepared to take all necessary steps to protect the public.
- DO NOT attempt to collect schoolchildren from the area, arrangements will be made to secure their safety.

- 5.3 The messages are broken down into four specific areas:
- Chemical Release (**Appendix 1**)
 - Explosive Radiation Dispersion Device ('Dirty Bomb') (**Appendix 2**)
 - Non-Explosive Radiation Dispersion (**Non-Explosive Dissemination, e.g., by hand-held spraying device**) (**Appendix 3**)
 - Biological Release (**Appendix 4**)

6. COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

- 6.1 The communications response to this type of incident will be different to most major incidents. Major incidents are usually contained to a confined area, whereas this type of incident may see contamination affect a wide area. Most communication planning relies heavily on mass media, in particular the broadcast media. While this remains an important channel of communication, people at risk of this type of incident may not have access to television and radio broadcasts. It will therefore be necessary for communications advisers to consider other channels including social media and forms of direct communication.
- 6.2 In some cases, TV broadcasting initiatives to gather existing agreed information on an incident and deliver it to the public already exist, to ensure, for example, that the public has adequate information during a civil emergency. In the event of a major incident, TV channels can deliver important messages and alerts across their local and national news programmes or their news websites. To ensure the effective use of the service, joint arrangements between the emergency services, local authority and other emergency responders is required so that information can be assembled and agreed quickly.

CHEMICAL RELEASE

POINTS TO COVER FOR A PUBLIC ADDRESS:

1. What is happening.
2. What to do if you are near the release of the chemical – either in the immediate area or the surrounding area.
3. What to do if you have symptoms or think you have had contact with a chemical.
4. What to do if you are in a car that is in the immediate area of the release.
5. What is being done and how to get more information.

Initial health and safety information is almost identical for all chemical agents, with the exception of symptoms. These messages are general for all categories of chemical agents. It will be necessary to carefully review and revise the messages during an actual event once the agent is confirmed.

What is happening.

- This is an urgent message from the police. Please pay careful attention to this message to protect your health and that of others.
- Police suspect that an incident involving the release of a chemical has occurred in the [xxx area] or [xxx building] at [xxx time].
- [xxx number] of cases have been reported, with symptoms of [chemical agent]. These symptoms include: [list of symptoms].
- Give description of agent (e.g., colourless gas, odourless, or mild smell of garlic or almond), depending upon the agent.
- If the chemical was released in your building, follow the instructions of emergency services at the scene.
- Stay away from the [xxx area].
- Emergency services are starting to close off the area, find and treat casualties, and help people in the area decontaminate themselves.
- If you are not within the [xxx area], stay where you are and avoid unnecessary travel until further instructions are issued.
- Emergency services are working together with partner agencies to find out more about this situation. Updates will be made as soon as we know more.
- By staying informed and following instructions from the emergency services you can protect yourself, your family and the community against this public health threat.

What to do if you are near the release of the chemical – either in the immediate area or the surrounding area:

- If you are outdoors, emergency services may ask you to leave the area or find shelter nearby. If you are told to go indoors or you are already inside, follow these instructions:
 - If possible go to the highest floor you can and find a room with as few windows and doors as possible. Chemicals are generally heavier than air, therefore upper levels of buildings will have cleaner air.
 - Reduce air flow from outside to inside. Close windows, doors, air vents, air conditioning and anything else that exposes the room to outside air.
- Do not eat or drink anything that may have been exposed to the chemical.
- Turn on the radio, television or Internet news for updated health and safety announcements. Announcements will be made when it is safe to go outside.

What to do if you have symptoms or think you have had contact with a chemical (within 15 minutes of exposure):

- Remove your outer layer of clothing.
- If you show signs or symptoms of exposure to caustic or irritant substances – for example, redness, itching and burning of the eyes or skin – rinse with water.
- If your eyes are burning or irritated, rinse with water for 10-15 minutes. Do not use soap in your eyes.
- Do not touch other people to avoid spreading the chemical.
- If possible, put clothes inside a bag and seal it. Put this sealed bag into another bag and seal again. Advice will be given later regarding disposal or cleaning.
- The illness caused by a chemical agent cannot spread from person to person. It is not a contagious disease that can be spread by coughing or sneezing.
- People can spread the chemical if it is on their skin, clothing, or hair. People can also spread the chemical through bodily fluids, such as vomit. If someone else comes into contact with the chemical in these ways, they may become ill.
- Once exposed people have removed outer clothes and washed, most of the chemical will be removed and is much less likely to be spread.

The following information could be provided to people in vehicles to reduce their potential exposure.

If you are in your car in xxx area and cannot leave the affected area, you can minimize the risk of exposure to the chemical by:

1. Pulling over to the side of the road in a manner that will not block or interfere with the movement of emergency vehicles.
2. Turning off the engine and shutting any vents that draw in outside air, including those of the air conditioner. Running the engine and driving pull outside air into the car and could expose you to additional chemicals.
3. To minimize the amount of chemical you inhale, cover your mouth and nose with a cloth, such as a scarf or a handkerchief.
4. Listen for further instructions from emergency personnel on the scene or listen for news on the radio.

What is being done and how to get more information:

- We will share information and give more instructions as the situation develops.
- Go to [\[insert local media information here\]](#) for the latest information.



EXPLOSIVE RADIATION DISPERSION DEVICE (DIRTY BOMB)

POINTS:

1. What is happening.
2. What is an Explosive Radiation Dispersion Device (dirty bomb).
3. What to do if you are in the immediate area of the blast and have been severely injured.
4. What to do if you are in the immediate area of the blast but have not been injured, or have minor injuries.
5. How can I help protect myself indoors.
6. What is being done and how to get more information.

What is happening.

- This is an urgent police message. Please pay careful attention to this message to protect your health and that of others.
- We believe that a bomb containing radioactive material, sometimes called a "dirty bomb," has exploded in the [xxx area].
- Most of the injuries from this type of bomb, such as burns or bleeding, are from the blast itself, not from radioactive material. It is important to stress that this is NOT a nuclear bomb.
- If you were not close to the blast, you are not in any immediate danger.
- Emergency services are starting to close off the area, find and treat anyone with injuries, and help people in the area decontaminate themselves.
- Stay away from the [xxx area].
- If you are not within the [xxx area], stay where you are and avoid unnecessary travel until further instructions are issued.
- Emergency services are working with partner agencies to find out more about this situation. Updates will be made as soon as we know more.
- By staying informed and following instructions from the emergency services you can protect yourself, your family and the community against this public health threat.

What is a dirty bomb:

- A dirty bomb is a device that uses conventional explosives, such as dynamite, to spread radioactive material in the form of powder or pellets.
- A dirty bomb is not a nuclear bomb. It does not produce the tremendous force and destruction of a nuclear blast. It spreads limited amounts of radioactive material in the surrounding area.
- The primary dangers from a dirty bomb are the injuries associated with the explosion itself, such as burns or bleeding.
- The level of radiation caused by a dirty bomb is unlikely to be enough to cause severe radiation sickness.
- Radiation sickness is treated by managing the symptoms, providing supportive care and preventing infections.

What to do if you are in the immediate area of the blast and have been severely injured:

- If you or a family member have life-threatening injuries associated with the explosion, such as severe burns or bleeding, call [insert relevant national emergency number here].

What to do if you are in the immediate area of the blast but have not been injured, or have minor injuries:

- Stay indoors. Do not leave shelter for care of minor injuries such as cuts or scrapes.

- Stay away from explosion debris and radioactive debris.
- To minimize the amount of radioactive material you inhale, cover your mouth and nose with a cloth, such as a scarf or a handkerchief.
- Being near the explosion site does not necessarily mean that you had contact with radiation. However, if you are concerned about contact with radiation or are sick, follow the steps below to help protect yourself and others.

Decontamination instructions (within 15 minutes of exposure):

1. Do not touch other people as this can spread the radiation.
2. Remove your outer layer of clothing, including shoes or boots.
3. If possible, put clothes inside a bag and seal it. Put this sealed bag into another bag and seal again. Put the sealed plastic bag where others will not touch it. Advice will be given later regarding disposal or cleaning.
4. Be sure to keep cuts and abrasions covered to avoid getting radioactive material in them.
5. Wash any areas of exposed skin (hands, arms, face) thoroughly with soap and water right away. Shower if you can.

How can I help protect myself indoors:

- Go indoors. Find a room with as few windows and doors as possible.
- Reduce air flow from outside to inside. Close windows, doors, air vents, air conditioning and anything else that exposes the room to outside air.
- Do not eat or drink anything that may have been exposed to radiation or radioactive debris.
- Turn to the radio, television, or Internet news for updated health and safety announcements. Emergency services will inform you when it is safe to go outside or evacuate to another location.

What is being done and how to get more information:

- Emergency services are working to find and treat people who need help.
- Radiation levels will be monitored to determine what should be done to protect public health. We will share updated information as soon as we learn more.
- Go to [[insert relevant media information links here](#)] for the latest information.



RADIATION DISPERSION (NON-EXPLOSIVE DISSEMINATION, E.G., BY HAND-HELD SPRAYING DEVICE)

POINTS:

1. What is happening.
2. What to do if you are in the immediate area and have been contaminated.
3. What to do if you are concerned about contamination but do not live near [xxx area].
4. How can I help protect myself indoors.

What is happening.

- This is an urgent police message. Please pay careful attention to this message to protect your health and that of others.
- Emergency services believe that radioactive material has been dispersed in the [xxx area].
- It is believed that the radiation has been spread by means of [xxx hand held spray, spread of powder, etc] in the form of a [liquid, powder, solid]
- Emergency services are starting to close off the area and are helping people in the area to decontaminate themselves.
- If you are not in the immediate area, you are not in any immediate danger.
- The levels of radiation are unlikely to cause severe radiation sickness.
- Radiation sickness is treated by managing the symptoms, providing supportive care, and preventing infections.
- Emergency services are working together and updated announcements will be made as soon as we know more.
- We are working to find out more about this release. By staying informed and following instructions from the emergency services you can protect yourself, your family and the community against this public health threat.

What to do if you are in the immediate area of the release but have not been contaminated.

- Stay indoors. Do not leave shelter for care of minor injuries such as cuts or scrapes.
- Stay away from suspicious materials, such as liquids or powders.
- To minimize the amount of radioactive material you inhale, cover your mouth and nose with a cloth, such as a scarf or a handkerchief.
- Being where the radiation was released does not necessarily mean that you have been contaminated. However, if you are concerned about contact with radiation follow the steps below to help protect yourself and others.

What to do if you think you have had contact with radioactive material (within 15 minutes of exposure):

1. Do not touch other people as this can spread radiation.
2. Remove your outer layer of clothing, including shoes or boots.
3. If possible, put clothes inside a bag and seal it. Put this sealed bag into another bag and seal again. Put the sealed plastic bag where others will not touch it. Advice will be given later regarding disposal or cleaning.
4. Be sure to keep cuts and abrasions covered to avoid getting radioactive material in the cuts.
5. Wash any areas of exposed skin (hands, arms, face) thoroughly with soap and water right away. Shower if you can.

How can I help protect myself indoors.

- Go indoors. Find a room with as few windows and doors as possible.
- Reduce air flow from outside to inside. Close doors, windows, air vents, air conditioning and anything else that exposes the room to outside air.
- Do not eat or drink anything that may have been exposed to radiation.
- Turn to the radio, television, or Internet news for updated health and safety announcements. Emergency services will inform you when it is safe to go outside or evacuate to another location.

What is being done and how to get more information:

- Emergency services are working to find and treat people who need help.
- Radiation levels will be monitored to determine what should be done to protect public health. We will share updated information as soon as we learn more.
- Go to [\[insert relevant media information links here\]](#) for the latest information.



BIOLOGICAL RELEASE

POINTS TO GET OVER:

1. What is happening.
2. What is a biological agent. (bacteria/virus/spore/ toxin)
3. What to do if you were not near the xxx area where the agent may have been released but still have concerns.
4. What to do if you were at or near the xxx area where the agent might have been released.
5. What is being done and how to get more information.

What is happening.

- This is an urgent police message. Please pay careful attention to this message to protect your health and that of others.
- Police believe that a potentially harmful [biological agent (bacteria/virus/spore/toxin)] may have been deliberately released in the [xxx area].
- At this time, we do not know the extent or source of the release. Emergency services are working with partner agencies to find out more about this situation. Updates will be made as soon as we know more.
- Based on what we know now, only those people who were in [xxx area] are at risk of becoming ill.
- By staying informed and following instructions from health officials, you can protect yourself, your family and the community against this public health threat.

What to do if you were not near the [xxx area] where the [biological agent (bacteria/virus/spore/toxin)] may have been released, but still have concerns:

- It is natural to be concerned. If you were not near the [xxx area], you most likely have not had contact with the biological agent and will not become ill.
- Stay informed by turning to the radio, television or Internet news for updated health and safety announcements.
- With your cooperation, we can protect the health and safety of our community.

What to do if you are in the immediate area of the release but have not been contaminated:

- Stay away from suspicious materials, such as liquids or powders.
- If you are indoors, close all doors and windows and move to another room away from the primary contamination.
- To minimize the possibility of inhaling the material, cover your mouth and nose with a cloth, such as a scarf or a handkerchief.
- Wash your hands, face and arms with soap and water.
- For a release outside, move inside to reduce the possibility of inhaling the biological materials.

Suspicious packages

- If you see a strange package, envelope or other container that you suspect may contain a suspicious substance, do not open it [give details of suspect package if known.] Leave the area and stop others from entering the area. Call [insert relevant national emergency number here] or the local police for more instructions.
- Stay informed. Listen for announcements from public health officials about what areas to avoid.

What to do if you think you have had contact with biological materials:

1. Do not touch other people as this can spread the biological contamination.
2. Remove your outer layer of clothing including shoes.
3. If possible, put clothes inside a bag and seal it. Put this sealed bag into another bag and seal again. Put the sealed plastic bag where others will not touch it. Advice will be given later regarding disposal or cleaning.
4. Wash any areas of exposed skin (hands, arms, face) thoroughly with soap and water right away. Shower if you can.
5. Keep cuts and abrasions covered to avoid getting biological material in the cuts.

What is being done and how to get more information:

- Emergency services are working to find and treat people who need help.
- We are working to identify the biological agent and provide medical treatment.
- Go to [\[insert relevant media information links here\]](#) to hear the latest information.



ABOUT INTERPOL

INTERPOL's role is to enable police in our 190 member countries to work together to fight transnational crime and make the world a safer place. We maintain global databases containing police information on criminals and crime, and we provide operational and forensic support, analysis services and training. These policing capabilities are delivered worldwide and support three global programmes: counter-terrorism, cybercrime, and organized and emerging crime.



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