



FINAL DRAFT BAHAMAS NATIONAL STANDARDS

Environmental management — Environmental communication — Guidelines and examples

FDBNS ISO 14063: 2020

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BBSQ Foreword

This draft national standard is an identical adoption of the International Standard Organisation ISO 14063: 2020 *Environmental management - Environmental communication - Guidelines and examples*. The national committee responsible for reviewing this draft standard is Technical Committee 14 Environmental Management and Protection. This draft standard contains requirements that are relevant for The Bahamas.

BBSQ Committee Representation

This International Standards will be adopted as a National Standard under the supervision of the National Technical Committee for Environmental Management and Protection (NTC 14) hosted by the Bahamas Bureau of Standards and Quality, which at the time comprised of the following members:

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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular, the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO documents should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights. Details of any patent rights identified during the development of the document will be in the Introduction and/or on the ISO list of patent declarations received (see www.iso.org/patents).

Any trade name used in this document is information given for the convenience of users and does not constitute an endorsement.

For an explanation of the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), see www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html.

This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 207, *Environmental management*, Subcommittee SC 4, *Environmental performance evaluation*, in collaboration with the European Committee for Standardization (CEN) Technical Committee CEN/SS S26, *Environmental management*, in accordance with the Agreement on technical cooperation between ISO and CEN (Vienna Agreement).

This second edition cancels and replaces the first edition (ISO 14063:2006), which has been technically revised. The main changes compared with the previous edition are as follows:

- the definition for environmental communication objective (3.7) has been changed to be harmonized with definition of objective in ISO 14001:2015;
- references to social media have been included;
- [Table A.1](#) has been updated to reflect revised standards.

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at www.iso.org/members.html.

Introduction

In today's global economy, communication on environmental values, actions and performance has become an essential activity of organizations due to both increased public concern and interest, and governmental activities related to the environment. Organizations all over the world are increasingly confronted with the need to provide information to support policy positions and actions, and present and explain the environmental implications of their activities, products and services. There is also a growing need to listen to interested parties, and incorporate their views and requirements as part of environmental communication.

Organizations have a need to obtain and provide information about and respond to environmental issues, concerns and programmes. Furthermore, with the general availability of devices such as smart phones and tablets, communication is almost instantaneous, requiring the organization to be able to respond to any issue or information request in a timely manner. Information to be communicated is influenced by factors such as the organization's geographic location and distribution, size and types of activities. Motivations for communication include the following:

- the interest of the organization to share information on its environmental practices;
- a request for information by employees or investors, a government agency, a community group, a customer or supplier, or any other interested party;
- the need to discuss with interested parties, especially with target groups, a proposed action of the organization, such as expansion of an existing facility, or siting of a new facility, or the introduction of a new product or service;
- environmental risk management;
- compliance obligation requirements;
- response to suggestions (negative or positive) from interested parties;
- response to false and/or malicious accusations of environmental impropriety by parties intending to disparage the organization to promote their agendas;
- the increasing importance of addressing environmental issues.

Environmental communication is the process of sharing information to build trust, credibility and partnerships, to raise awareness, and to use in decision-making. The processes used and the content of environmental communication will vary with the objectives and circumstances of the organization and can be built on substantive information.

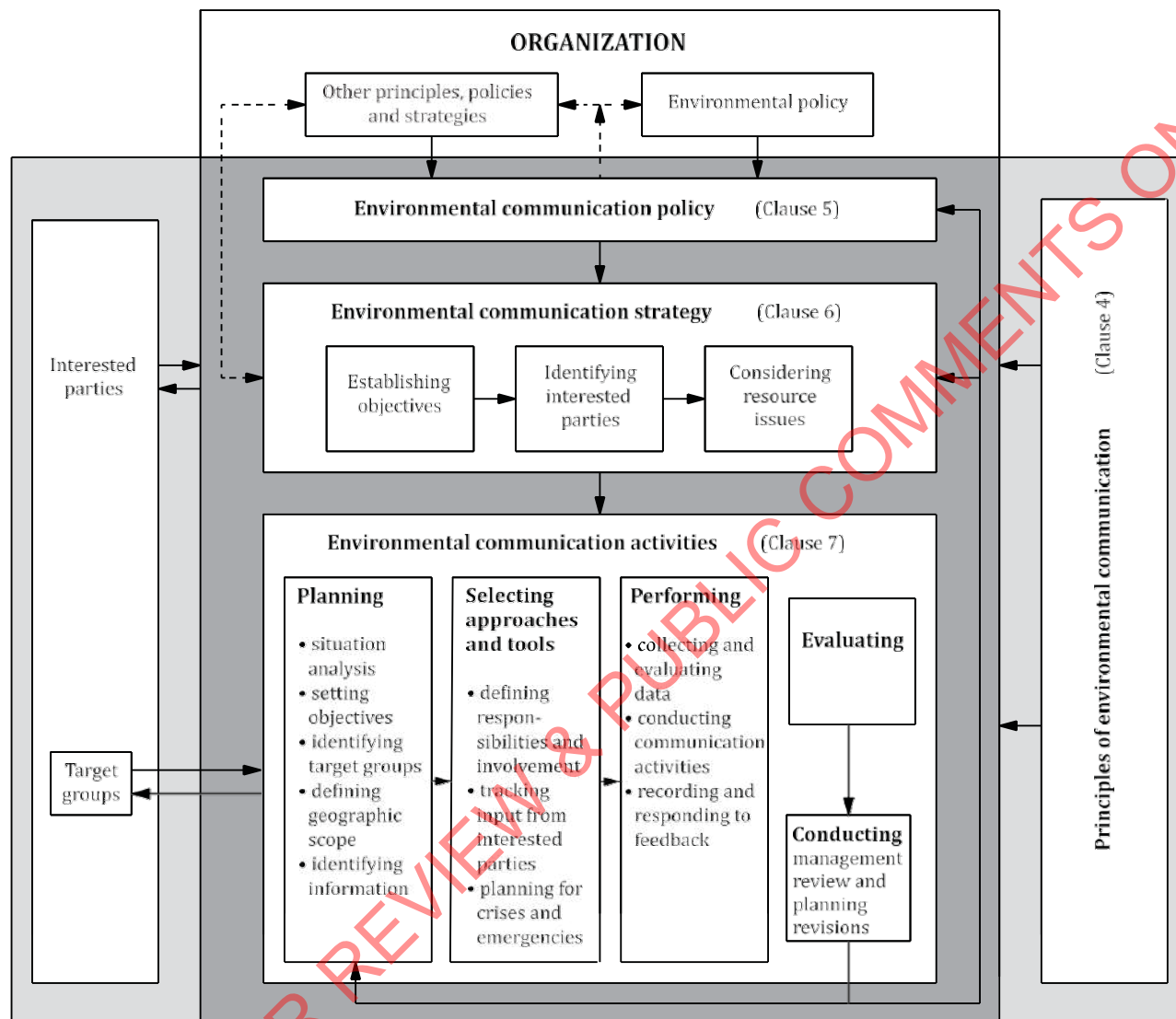
Environmental communication is broader than environmental reporting. It has many purposes and takes many forms. Environmental communication can be ad hoc or planned. An example of ad hoc communication occurs when a facility manager attends a community event and answers questions. Planned communication can cover a range from limited to full participation of interested parties, as follows.

- a) One-way communication occurs when the organization distributes information, for example, when an organization issues an environmental report with no opportunity for questions or discussion.
- b) Two-way communication occurs with an exchange of information and ideas among the organization and interested parties.
- c) In participatory decision-making, including effective feedback that affects the organization and/or the local community, an organization collaborates with interested parties.

Engagement with interested parties provides an opportunity for an organization to learn their issues and concerns. It can lead to knowledge being gained by both sides and can influence opinions and perceptions. When properly done, any particular approach can be successful and satisfy the needs of the organization and interested parties. Understanding the communication pattern/behaviour of

each interested party (or target group) can be important in environmental communications. The most effective environmental communication process involves ongoing contact by the organization with internal and external interested parties, as part of the organization's overall communications strategy.

Figure 1 shows the interrelationships and flow of environmental communication.



NOTE 1 Titles in bold and numbered refer to the clauses in this document.

NOTE 2 Dotted line arrows indicate the environmental communication system relationship with other elements of the organization. Full arrows indicate the interrelationship within the environmental communication system.

NOTE 3 Shading indicates the scope of the environmental communication system. Darker shading indicates the overlap of the environmental communication system with the organization.

Figure 1 — Environmental communication

Environmental communication often results in many benefits, such as:

- assisting interested parties in understanding an organization's environmental commitments, policies and performance;
- providing inputs/suggestions for improving the environmental performance of an organization's activities, products and services, and progress toward sustainability;

- improving understanding of interested parties' needs and concerns to foster trust and dialogue;
- promoting an organization's environmental credentials, achievements and performance;
- raising the importance and level of environmental awareness to support an environmentally responsible culture and values within the organization;
- addressing interested parties' concerns and complaints about operational and emergency environmental hazards;
- enhancing interested parties' perceptions of the organization;
- increasing business support and shareholder confidence.

Environmental communication is one of the crucial issues to be dealt with by any organization, with or without an environmental management system in place. Environmental communication is more than a question of organization and management, it relates to the organization's values as well. To ensure successful communication processes, it is important for the organization to consider itself a responsible partner within society and to address the environmental expectations of interested parties.

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Environmental management — Environmental communication — Guidelines and examples

1 Scope

This document gives guidelines to organizations for general principles, policy, strategy and activities relating to both internal and external environmental communication. It uses proven and well-established approaches for communication, adapted to the specific conditions that exist in environmental communication.

It is applicable to all organizations regardless of their size, type, location, structure, activities, products and services, and whether or not they have an environmental management system in place.

It can be used in combination with any of the ISO 14000 family of standards, or on its own.

NOTE 1 A reference table to the ISO 14000 family is provided in [Annex A](#).

NOTE 2 ISO 14020, ISO 14021, ISO 14024, ISO 14025 and ISO 14026 provide specific environmental communication tools and guidance relating to product labels and declarations.

2 Normative references

There are no normative references in this document.

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminological databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

- ISO Online browsing platform: available at <https://www.iso.org/obp>
- IEC Electropedia: available at <http://www.electropedia.org/>

3.1

environmental communication

process that an *organization* (3.4) conducts to provide and obtain information, and to engage in dialogue with internal and external *interested parties* (3.5) to encourage a shared understanding on environmental issues, aspects and performance

3.2

environmental communication policy

overall intentions and directions of an *organization* (3.4) related to its *environmental communication* (3.1) as formally expressed by top management

Note 1 to entry: The environmental communication policy can be a separate policy or part of other policies within the organization.

3.3

environmental communication strategy

organization's (3.4) framework for implementing its *environmental communication policy* (3.2) and for the setting of *environmental communication objectives* (3.7)

3.4 organization

person or group of people that has its own functions with responsibilities, authorities and relationships to achieve its objectives

Note 1 to entry: The concept of organization includes, but is not limited to, sole-trader, company, corporation, firm, enterprise, authority, partnership, charity or institution, or part or combination thereof, whether incorporated or not, public or private.

[SOURCE: ISO 14001:2015, 3.1.4]

3.5 interested party

person or *organization* (3.4) that can affect, be affected by, or perceive itself to be affected by a decision or activity

EXAMPLE Customers, communities, suppliers, regulators, non-governmental organizations, investors and employees.

Note 1 to entry: To “perceive itself to be affected” means the perception has been made known to the organization.

Note 2 to entry: Interested parties may be at the local, regional or international level.

[SOURCE: ISO 14001:2015, 3.1.6, modified — Note 2 to entry has been added.]

3.6 target group

interested party or parties (3.5) selected as the focus of an *organization's* (3.4) *environmental communication* (3.1) activity

3.7 environmental communication objective

result, consistent with the *environmental communication policy* (3.2), that an *organization* (3.4) sets itself to achieve as part of its environmental strategy

Note 1 to entry: The term “environmental communication target” used in the previous edition of this document is not used in this new edition, to be harmonized with ISO 14015:2001 where “target” is not used. The organization can, however, still use two levels of objectives as described in 7.1.3, Practical help box 7.

3.8 social media

online technologies and practices that people use to share opinions, insights, experiences and perspectives with each other, transforming traditional one-to-many interactions into many-to-many interactions

[SOURCE: ISO 2052:2019, 3.95]

4 Principles of environmental communication

4.1 General

These principles of environmental communication are for organizations to apply, taking into account the identification of interested parties and their needs and expectations.

4.2 Principles

4.2.1 Transparency

The processes, procedures, methods, data sources and assumptions used in environmental communication are available to all interested parties, taking account of the confidentiality of information as required. Interested parties are informed of their role in environmental communication.

4.2.2 Appropriateness

The information provided in environmental communication is relevant to interested parties, using formats, language and media that meet their interests and needs, enabling them to participate fully. The communication takes into account diversity, inclusion and gender of the interested parties.

4.2.3 Credibility

Environmental communication is conducted in an honest and fair manner. Information is provided that is truthful, accurate, substantive and not misleading to interested parties. Information and data are developed using recognized and reproducible methods and indicators.

Environmental communication is open to the needs of interested parties. Queries and concerns of interested parties are responded to in a full and timely manner. Interested parties are aware of how their queries and concerns have been addressed.

Given that the use of social media provides instantaneous communication, the speed in which queries are posted and responded to is controlled.

4.2.4 Clarity

Environmental communication approaches and language are understandable to interested parties to minimize ambiguity.

4.2.5 Regionality

Environmental communication takes into consideration the local or regional environmental context relevant to the area where the corresponding environmental impact occurs.

See ISO 14026:2017, 5.5.

5 Environmental communication policy

5.1 Management commitment

The organization's top management should set, express its commitment to, and promote the environmental communication policy. The policy should be consistent with the principles in [Clause 4](#) and should clearly state the following:

- a) commitment to engage in dialogue with interested parties;
- b) commitment to disclose information about the organization's environmental performance;
- c) significance of internal and external environmental communication in the organization;
- d) commitment to implement the policy and provide the necessary resources;
- e) commitment to address key environmental issues.

The environmental communication policy may form part of, or be integrated into, an organization's communication policy or environmental policy, or may be a separate policy.

5.2 Developing the policy

In developing the policy, those responsible for environmental management within the organization should interact and engage with those responsible for communication to ensure that the policy is coherent and consistent with other principles, policies and the values of the organization. Subsequently, all levels of management should implement the policy and provide input for the formulation and modification of the policy.

An environmental communication policy does not need to be detailed but should convey to interested parties the importance that the organization places on communication about environmental issues, environmental aspects and their associated impacts, and environmental performance. An organization's vision, mission, values and culture can play a fundamental role in developing an environmental communication policy. The organization should make a commitment in the policy to reflect local, regional and/or national cultural characteristics in its environmental communication activities, where applicable.

Important factors that should be considered when developing an environmental communication policy include:

- the organization's business sector and its product or service portfolio;
- its size;
- its organizational infrastructure;
- its corporate governance;
- its market and brand strategies;
- the existence of an environmental management system;
- consideration of environmental aspects and impacts, including those in the supply chain, use and end of life stages of products;
- interaction with related aspects, such as health and safety and other sustainability approaches;
- legal requirements regarding the disclosure of environmental information;
- local, regional, national and international voluntary codes of ethics/conduct;
- the expectations of interested parties;
- the public's "right to know".

The policy should be communicated to interested parties, both internal and external, as appropriate.

6 Environmental communication strategy

6.1 General considerations

The organization's management should develop a strategy to implement its environmental communication policy. The strategy can include environmental communication objectives, identification of interested parties, an indication of when and what it plans to communicate, and a management commitment to allocate adequate resources. An organization should clarify what is possible, taking into account its resources so that it can best and most realistically meet the expectations of interested parties.

Consideration should be given to the fact that environmental communication is part of the organization's environmental activities in general and can be aligned with other elements of management systems, policies, strategies or relevant activities.

Practical help box 1 — Developing the environmental communication strategy

When developing the environmental communication strategy, the questions below can be helpful.

- Why is the organization engaging in environmental communication and what are its purposes?
- What are the organization's key environmental issues and impacts?
- What are the main issues to be covered, messages to be conveyed, and communication techniques, approaches, tools and channels to be used?
- What are the environmental conditions relevant to the organization, its products and its context?
- What are the risks/opportunities generated by the communication to be taken into account in the strategy?
- How much time is needed to implement the strategy?
- How will the strategy involve and coordinate the environmental managers, interested parties, individual(s) responsible for environmental issues and individual(s) who are responsible for the organization's internal and external communication?
- What are the local, regional, national and international boundaries for the strategy?

Once defined, the strategy should be approved by top management and then used as the basis for the organization's environmental communications activities.

6.2 Integrating environmental communication into the organization's general communication process

For efficient environmental communication, it is important to consider the organization's general communication process.

Practical help box 2

When developing the process for environmental communication the organization should consider the following questions.

- What means of communication are already implemented? Can they be used for environmental communication as well?
- Which functions or persons are already assigned with communication responsibilities? Can they also take responsibilities for communicating environmental issues?
- Which interested parties have been identified for other reasons than interest in environmental performance or environmental issues? Can environmental communication be coordinated with other communication for these interested parties?
- Do communication plans exist? How can environmental communication be included in the existing plans?
- What kind of information is already publicly available? Can environmental information be included there? Or, can separate communication channels be more appropriate?
- How and when are objectives for communication established? How can setting environmental communication objectives be an integrated part in that process.

6.3 Resource efficiency

An organization's environmental communication activities are dependent upon available resources. The environmental communication strategy should include an allocation of human, technical and financial resources, designated responsibilities and authority, and defined actions. Employees' experiences and training needs can also be considered.

For efficient use of resources, the organization should develop a communication process that is appropriate considering the purpose and context of the organization, including the nature, scale and environmental impacts of its activities, products and services.

Practical help box 3

Questions to be asked when developing an appropriate model or process for communication may include the following.

- Who are the interested parties? What are their needs and expectations?
- Is the organization big or small? Which internal and external resources are available? Can part of the communication be outsourced, e.g. surveys?
- What is the status of communication skills within the organization? Are there training needs?
- Is the organization public or private? Is there any communication policy or code of conduct from a superior or parent organization?
- Does the organization act in business to business relation in a value chain? Or does it supply consumer products to end users?

6.4 Establishing environmental communication objectives

An organization should set environmental communication objectives, which are useful because they can provide the basis for an effective environmental communication strategy. When setting its environmental communication objectives, an organization should ensure that they are aligned with its environmental communication policy, take account of the views of internal and external interested parties, and are consistent with the environmental communication principles in [Clause 4](#). On setting objectives for its environmental communication activities, the organization should consider its priorities and desired results, making sure that the objectives defined are expressed in such a way that no further explanations are necessary.

Practical help box 4 — Priorities for setting objectives

Priority considerations for setting objectives may include:

- environmental issues related to the organization's specific activities, products and services;
- complying with applicable legal requirements and with other requirements to which the organization subscribes;
- influencing public policy on environmental issues;
- providing information and encouraging understanding by interested parties about the environmental activities, aspects, impacts and performance of the organization;
- providing information and encouraging understanding of environmental information of the organization's products, e.g. environmental labels, footprints or declarations;
- meeting the environmental information expectations of interested parties;
- establishing ongoing dialogue on environmental matters;
- minimizing internal and/or external conflicts;
- improving the organization's credibility and reputation;
- improving public knowledge and the environmental image of the organization's products and services;
- stimulating environmental innovation and creativity.

Examples of objectives and their relation to objectives are provided in [7.1.3](#), Practical help box 7.

6.5 Identifying interested parties

In developing the environmental communication strategy and setting objectives, the organization should identify internal and external interested parties who have expressed an interest in its activities, products and services. It can also identify other potential interested parties with whom it wishes to communicate to achieve the overall objectives of its environmental communication strategy.

Subsequently, target groups may be identified for more specific environmental communication activities (see [7.1.4](#)).

Practical help box 5 — Examples of interested parties

Some examples of interested parties that could be considered by an organization include:

- past, present and future employees and their representatives;
- customers and consumers;
- suppliers, contractors, wholesalers and distributors;
- competitors;
- shareholders;
- banks and financial/investment community;
- insurance companies;
- rating agencies;
- public authorities;
- legislators;
- regulators;
- politicians and opinion leaders;
- neighbours and local community;
- communities associated with supply chain organizations;
- schools, academics and researchers;
- professionals involved in environmental issues;
- media organizations;
- non-governmental organizations.

NOTE See ISO 14004 for further guidance on identifying interested parties.

7 Environmental communication activities

7.1 Planning an environmental communication activity

7.1.1 General

Organizations will typically undertake a range of environmental communication activities in implementing their environmental communication policy. In advancing the environmental communication strategy and objectives, specific environmental communication activities can be developed, taking into account the environmental issue, geographic boundaries and interested parties.

NOTE Social media has no geographical boundaries and, thus, even if the activity is meant to be a local event, it will have a wider audience.

Practical help box 6 — Planning an environmental communication activity

In planning an environmental communication activity, an organization should consider the following questions.

- Is it appropriate to communicate the activity through the organization's web page or social media?
- Is this activity appropriate for use with social media?
- Is this activity consistent with the environmental communication principles in [Clause 4](#) and the organization's policy?
- If appropriate, does this activity enhance two-way communication?
- Can this activity promote consensus with interested parties?
- Does this activity offer an opportunity to reach and interact with its target group(s) and potentially address their interests?
- Does this activity provide an opportunity to address multiple issues in depth?
- Does this activity focus on the key issues?
- Does the activity provide information tailored to the target group(s)?
- Is this activity relatively easy to implement?
- Does the activity provide for information transfer at relatively low cost?
- Is this activity easy to update?
- Is the effectiveness of this activity measurable?
- Is this activity a good vehicle for education?
- Is this activity creating a constructive atmosphere?
- Is this activity an effective way to get publicity or increase public awareness?
- Is this activity a sensitive issue that could be perceived as an enticement to individual or corporate trolling?

7.1.2 Situational analysis

The development or improvement of an environmental communication activity begins with an understanding of the context for the communication.

In the situational analysis, the organization should consider the following issues:

- a) existing environmental communication activities and commitments;
- b) identification and understanding of issues of concern to interested parties;
- c) expectations and perceptions of the interested parties about the organization;
- d) environmental awareness of interested parties, such as local communities;
- e) communication media and activities that have proven to be the most effective in communicating with interested parties in similar situations;
- f) identification of the opinion leaders and their influence on issues related to environmental communication;

- g) public image of the organization on a specific issue;
- h) latest developments and trends on environmental issues related to the organization's specific activities, products and services;
- i) economic and financial implications;
- j) knowledge and understanding of the values and cultures of interested parties.

A variety of tools are available to assist in the situational analysis. Examples can be found in [Table 1](#). The situational analysis may lead to revised environmental communication objectives.

In evaluating the context for an environmental communication activity, it is also important to consider the potential costs and consequences of not communicating. These can be tangible, cost more than environmental communication in the long run and can also impose other costs on an organization, e.g. damage to reputation. The following hypothetical case highlights the implications of such a situation.

EXAMPLE Case 1: The costs of not conducting environmental communication.

A manager admitted that making a decision to burn a hazardous secondary liquid fuel at its plant, and not thoroughly discussing it with the community, resulted in a crisis. The organization did not anticipate the strength of reaction it would receive and therefore did not allocate sufficient resources for advance consultation and communication. A 90-year good working relationship between the organization and community dissolved overnight. The manager estimates that he spent the majority of two years trying to re-establish this relationship. The costs to the organization included his salary, countless time of other staff to meet with a range of interested parties, and the costs associated with hosting numerous public meetings and developing press releases and other media announcements. One outcome of this effort was the creation of a community liaison committee that included citizens who were the most vociferous about the decision to burn alternative fuels. The organization and regulators use this committee as a sounding board before making major decisions. After five years, trust has been re-established.

7.1.3 Setting environmental communication objectives

An organization can decide what it intends to achieve with an environmental communication activity and which media is the best way to obtain the objectives. Objectives should be established that are consistent with the environmental communication goals and that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-related. This will allow the organization to evaluate the environmental communication activity and determine whether or not the objective has been met.

Practical help box 7 — Examples of environmental communication goals and objectives

Organizations may set communication goals and objectives and define indicators for measuring results. The text that follows is an example.

Goal: Gain acceptance of a significant change at a facility based upon discussions with the community.

Objectives:

- reach 90 % of the neighbouring homes with a brochure explaining the change and the environmental impacts (the indicator is the percentage of homes reached);
- achieve 75 % acceptance in a survey with the community;
- conclude the communication effort three months before the proposed change starts.

Goal: Increase customer awareness of the organization's environmental performance.

Objectives:

- reach 80 % of the purchasers of a specific product;
- get feedback from 65 % of customers of a specific product regarding their understanding of the organization's environmental performance level;
- conclude the communication effort two months before the final version of the sustainability report is produced.

Goal: Improve environmental performance across the supply chain by communicating organizational goals, objectives and targets with suppliers, tracking how supply-chain changes improve environmental performance and sharing improvement information.

Objectives:

- reach 95 % of raw material suppliers and 65 % of suppliers of consumption items;
- get a questionnaire return from 100 % of raw material suppliers and 85 % of suppliers of consumption items;
- provide conclusions to allow changes in procurement procedures by given date.

Goal: Make end-use purchasers, B2B customers or public procurement buyers aware of the environmental product declarations (EPD) the organization has developed.

Objectives:

- reach 100 % of identified target groups with the information;
- make 80 % aware of the EPDs and their content;
- achieve a 60 % understanding of the information in the EPDs and use it as a tool when selecting suppliers.

7.1.4 Identifying target groups

In planning an environmental communication activity, an organization should identify the target groups among its interested parties. Good communication involves a range of possible target groups, not just those favourable to the organization or those with sufficient resources to organize and express themselves.

It is not uncommon to identify conflicting interests among different target groups. As a result, the environmental communication activities should address and respond to different and often conflicting

demands from target groups, in particular those that are the most influential and who may negatively impact the outcomes of an environmental communication activity. A rapid response process may be necessary, especially when using social media.

When undertaking an environmental communication activity, the organization should seek to understand the expectations and perceptions of target groups with respect to the organization's environmental performance. At its simplest, direct dialogue between a target group and the organization may generate the feedback required. If the organization is seeking input from target groups, it should explain why it is seeking information, and what it plans to do with the information obtained.

7.1.5 Defining geographic scope

For each environmental communication activity, the organization should define the areas or locations on which it will focus its environmental communication activities because different places, with different languages, culture and habits, may affect public needs and perception about the organization. The focus of any particular communication activity can range from a local community to the broader public, which may be located far from any facility or office of the organization.

An organization may be involved in addressing a specific environmental issue on more than one geographic scale. For example, greenhouse gas emissions may be covered by an environmental report with a local, regional, national or international focus. Different types of information may be required for these environmental communication activities, and common information may have to be presented in different ways, depending on the needs of the interested parties involved.

7.1.6 Identifying environmental information

The organization should anticipate environmental issues of concern to interested parties. This may help focus the collection of information environmental impacts and performances of its products, services, processes and activities. Based on the targets set for an environmental communication activity, appropriate quantitative and qualitative data and information can be selected or generated. Such information should be aligned to current standards and guidelines on environmental performance and performance indicators.

Practical help box 8 — Examples of information sources for an environmental communication activity

There are many sources and types of information available within most organizations, particularly those with an environmental management system such as that of ISO 14001, including:

- the organization's understanding of relevant external and internal issues;
- the organization's understanding of the needs and expectations of interested parties;
- information on the organization's strategies and their environment implications;
- environmental policies, management practices and performance measures, possibly available from an organization's environmental management system;
- lists of environmental aspects and impacts of activities, products and services;
- life cycle perspective of products and activities;
- data and other documentation used for environmental labels and declarations;
- lists of environmental indicators;
- data from environmental performance evaluations;
- routinely and occasionally collected information, such as the reports from facilities located in a specific area, reports from subsidiaries (for a holding company), research reports, monitoring, control and measurement data registers and analysis reports, etc.;
- routine regulatory reports;
- record of compliance with applicable legal requirements and with other requirements to which the organization subscribes;
- plans, records and guidance on emergency response, and response to accidents;
- manuals and records of employee training on the safe handling of material;
- professional qualification records of the organization's employees responsible for environmental matters (e.g. managers, technicians, experts);
- relevant financial and accounting data;
- information from community outreach activities.

Sometimes, available information within an organization does not exist in a form suitable for an environmental communication activity or for dialogue with non-technical target groups. The information should be used to prepare written materials or other types of communication in a form that is clear and appropriate for the relevant target groups.

This is particularly true, for example, in the case of environmental indicators, frequently used by organizations to communicate about their environmental performance. Such indicators, quantitative or qualitative, may be technical in nature, and should be explained in ways to make their use, significance and content understandable and useful to interested parties. In some cases, difficulty in collecting appropriate data could lead to revision of the approach to achieving targets. The following hypothetical case highlights the implications of such a situation.

NOTE 1 ISO 14031 provides guidance on the development of environmental performance indicators.

NOTE 2 For product related environmental information, requirements and guidance are provided in ISO 14021, ISO 14024, ISO 14046 and ISO 14067.

EXAMPLE Case 2: Identifying environmental performance indicators for an electronic equipment manufacturer.

An electronic equipment manufacturer consulted 75 interested parties to determine which environmental performance indicators the organization may report on. The main stages in the process were to:

- identify the important external and internal interested parties and determine their key concerns and expectations regarding the organization's environmental performance;
- identify environmental performance indicators to be addressed in the environmental report and the priority of these indicators among interested parties;
- assess the performance of the organization against these indicators;
- produce an organization environmental performance profile and communicate the results back to the interested parties.

Of the organization's interested parties, 75 participated in the process, including employees, customers, suppliers, opinion leaders, neighbours, legislators, regulators and the financial and insurance community.

Interviews were held between 5 to 15 representatives from each target group, totalling 75. The individuals were asked, "Which environmental issues do you consider important for the organization to be addressing and reporting on in its environmental reports?" Over 100 issues were identified, which were distilled into 11 indicators of environmental performance and management performance.

A workshop was also held, attended by 12 interested parties, to discuss and confirm the 11 indicators and to determine the relevant priority of each parameter.

The outcome of the process was the production of an environmental report, providing details of the organization's environmental performance. A number of environmental performance indicators were identified that are not usually addressed in environmental reports, e.g. "information technology in pursuit of sustainable development". Issues dealt with in the environmental report were prioritized according to feedback received from the interested parties, improving the report's focus on interested parties' demands and assisting the organization's allocation of resources for improving environmental performance. The approach increased the objectivity of the reporting process by incorporating the views of interested parties.

7.2 Selecting environmental communication content, approaches and tools

7.2.1 General

An organization's approach to environmental communication will be influenced by whether it wants to consult, understand, inform, persuade and/or involve target groups. It is important to note that environmental communication is a dynamic process and that there is an ongoing change among target groups and within organizations.

In choosing the approaches to communication, it is important to consider the needs and the degree of interest that the target groups involved in the communication activity have in the issues covered by the communication. In addition, it is equally important to consider how active the organization wishes to be in its communication. There are different approaches to communication depending upon whether the organization and the target groups are active or passive, and depending on the environmental communication objectives of the organization, the target groups and the organizational resources available for the communication.

An organization can tailor the information it provides, consistent with initial planning, for target groups. The information should:

- a) consider behavioural aspects and the social, cultural, educational, economic and political interests of target groups;
- b) use appropriate language;
- c) make use of visual images or electronic media where appropriate;

- d) be consistent with the selected approach and, where relevant, with other information on environmental issues previously communicated by the organization.

An organization may wish to test its means of information provision prior to making any public communication. Opinion research that focuses on testing of information provision can help identify areas needing more explanation or clarification, key issues, questions that need to be addressed, etc.

Tables 1 to 3 give details of communication approaches and tools.

Table 1 — Written communication approaches and tools

Technique	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses	Keep in mind
Websites	Electronic communication medium, accessible to all online external and internal interested parties. Can include downloadable reports, educational material or links to websites where users can provide feedback to the organization.	Offer great potential to reach out to many people on many issues (and to offer tailored information). Easy to update, with potential to effect two-way communication.	Companies often put brochures on their websites, which misses the opportunity for interactivity (e.g. video, real data, e-mail feedback).	Keep technical computer requirements to a low level as not everybody has the latest computer hardware. Need not be expensive. Answers to frequently asked questions can be provided on the website, with a phone number provided for more detailed inquiries.
Environmental or sustainability reports	Comprehensive presentation of commitment and performance on a number of key issues. Extracts or summaries of these reports can be included in other communication of the organization, e.g. financial reports.	Opportunity to address multiple issues in depth. Basic approach for building trust and credibility. Create internal transparency about all relevant issues of an organization.	Hard work to produce and can be difficult to update frequently. May provide information in a form that does not permit comparison with similar organizations. May set expectations that one may be distributed every year.	Address external and internal interested parties' interests. Can include difficulties and failures as well as successes. Appropriate sector reporting standards or indicators can be used to enable benchmarking.
Printed material (reports, brochures and newsletters)	Report or brochures: A brief summary of the facility or specific project of interest, key issues and how people can participate. Newsletter: Periodic update of facility activities. Informs and maintains links with interested parties.	Can cover a single issue if necessary. Inexpensive and quick to produce. Informs large numbers of people. Newsletters can be effective for both external and internal interested parties.	Can be misinterpreted. Only basic information given. No direct feedback. May be difficult to distribute in remote areas.	Issues have to be researched. Use basic language. Use photos and maps. Be objective. Include contact name, telephone number and address. Literacy may be an issue and cartoons or graphics can help.
Product or service information labels or declarations	Description of the significant environmental aspects/impacts associated with a product or service. In the case of products, it can be attached to product or available separately.	Can inform customers about the environmental aspects/impacts of a product or service.	May cause confusion because information is presented in brief form.	Form and content of environmental product labels may conform to the requirements of ISO 14020, ISO 14021, ISO 14024 and ISO 14025.

Table 1 (continued)

Technique	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses	Keep in mind
Posters/ displays	A description of a project, highlighting issues and set up in a public place.	Provide general information at relatively low costs. Reach many that may not participate otherwise.	Giving information, rather than receiving it.	Keep to main points. Use photos and maps. Update regularly. Advertise the location of the display. Provide a contact name and number.
Letters	Letters on specific issues to and from named individuals.	Can address the particular needs of interested parties. Quick and easy to produce.	Can be overly formal. Generally a poor way to communicate complex information.	Reading level of recipients. Make one argument well.
Email	Electronic method of sending information and messages. Offers an opportunity to send electronic copies of paper publications.	Inexpensive and easy way for people to send and receive messages and information. Quick exchange, dissemination is immediate. Opportunity to reach a large number of people quickly.	Not everyone has access to a computer or the ability to access emails. Message might be deleted before it is read if people think it is unimportant.	When sending attachments, ensure that the recipient has access to compatible software.
Media/ newspaper feature articles	Explain features of a facility or project.	Can reach a large audience. Convenient for the public. Good vehicle for education.	Likely to be edited by the paper so that only part of the story is told. In remote areas or developing countries, not necessarily widely available.	Local media and nationwide media may require different approaches, style and level of detail.
Media/news releases	Information is prepared and distributed to the media for its use.	An effective and cheap way to get publicity and interest.	Media may not cover unless the story is deemed newsworthy. Likely to be edited to meet guidelines.	Avoid misrepresenting the organization's environmental performance.

Table 1 (continued)

Technique	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses	Keep in mind
Footprint communication	The communication of a metric reporting life cycle assessment (LCA) results addressing an area of concern, along with any supporting information	LCA information, which can be very complex, is simplified and presented in a way that addresses a particular area of concern. Footprints developed under the same programme and using the same product category rules enable comparisons between products. There are also comparative footprint communications and performance tracking footprint communications that are specifically intended to show improvement.	There may be limited awareness and understanding of footprints by some members of society	Apply the relevant ISO documents for footprint quantification, e.g. ISO/TS 14027, ISO 14044, ISO 14046 and ISO 14067. Apply ISO 14026 for communication.
Social media	Social media applications can be accessible to all or access can be controlled. Applications provide real time information on current activities in addition to providing access to online documentation.	Information can be provided immediately and updated as fast as events change. Access can be controlled and allows for two-way communication.	Uncontrolled access can allow for trolling, improper language, racism and hate text. Controlled access can trigger concerns with the company's transparency and credibility.	Establish ground rules to control language, rudeness and other improper behaviours. Establish different access points based on the need, such as specific access for customers, employees, vendors and neighbours.
Media/advertising	Paid for promotional material, e.g. a straight advert in a newspaper, or sponsorship of a section (such as the environment page of the regional paper).	Reaches a large audience.	Can be expensive. May have limited life span. Limited opportunity to describe complex issues.	Audience profile of publication/programme within which the advertisement appears.

Table 2 — Verbal communication approaches and tools

Technique	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses	Keep in mind
Public meetings	A way to present information and exchange views. Addresses specific aspect of an agenda or project. Consists of presentations and question-and-answer sessions or formal, timed testimony.	Seen as "legitimate" consultation. Information provided to large number of people. Costs are low. People usually willing to attend.	Interactions can be limited. Does not ensure all views are heard. May become an emotional shouting match. Vocal minority may dominate.	Often best to use after smaller activities (interviews, focus groups) to know what the interested parties' reaction will be in advance. Advertise the meeting well. Staff needs proven experience. Use an independent chairperson and/or a facilitator/moderator, if possible.

Table 2 (continued)

Technique	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses	Keep in mind
Interested party interviews/ personal contact	Talking with people in their homes, offices, or a neutral location.	Two-way exchange of information. People feel they have been heard. Specific issues can be addressed. An honest talk may build trust. Interviews help identify key issues and concerns and establish relationships.	Difficult to identify all interested parties. Time consuming. May be threatening for some. May sometimes be culturally inappropriate.	Identify individuals who represent the types of interested parties who could be or are being affected by a specific activity. Accept that some people may want professional representation. Often good to include influential interested parties. Meet at a location that is convenient for interested parties.
Focus groups	Meeting with a small group of interested parties with a similar background (e.g. government officials or residents) to discuss a particular topic.	Allows a free exchange of ideas because participants feel comfortable being with their peers. Often a consensus can be reached about the most important issues.	Time consuming to conduct focus groups with all important interested parties.	Often best used after some initial interviews with interested parties to identify the main issues that may be raised.
Surveys	Questionnaires used with interested parties (may be conducted by an independent organization if deemed necessary) to gather demographic information from the respondents and indicate their issues and concerns.	Helpful to use when a company is planning to establish itself in a community or if a major change in operations is being considered. Also, good to update on some regular basis (e.g. every two years).	Surveys may be labour intensive depending on the complexity of the questionnaire, the way questions are asked (e.g. personally or via web), the number of persons in the sample and the number and size of the geographical locations chosen.	Surveys can be conducted door-to-door or over the telephone. They may also be written or be performed over the internet.
Open houses, information days, site visit, videos	Open houses are usually held at a central, public spot, and provide a chance for people to ask questions and discuss issues. Information days can be combined with site visits to give the public a chance to see a facility first hand and ask questions. Videos can be used at any of these events to explain facility operations.	Allow for direct interaction. Provide opportunity to correct misinformation and explore issues. Can be useful for reaching both external and internal interested parties.	Are more giving than receiving. Can be expensive, require many staff hours. Relies on staff knowledge and skills.	Have to be well advertised. Staff have to be well briefed. Project manager should be present. Issues raised have to be recorded. Staff cannot be defensive but be listening actively to interested parties' comments.

Table 2 (continued)

Technique	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses	Keep in mind
Guided tours with an environmental focus	Visits offered to target groups to areas or installations of interest to the organization.	Provide opportunity for face-to-face contacts between the organization personnel and the visiting parties. Allows on-the-spot opportunity to show the organization's environmental activities.	May be interpreted as a public relations exercise if only the good aspects are shown. Is limited in terms of the number of people reached by the effort. Can be expensive, require many staff hours. Relies on staff knowledge and skills.	The visit can touch on the issues directly related to the organization's products, processes and activities or to issues related to the organization's business.
Workshops, conferences, dialogue events	Opportunities for a range of interested parties to discuss ideas, concerns and issues.	Can be very productive and helpful in reaching consensus on issues with high priority.	Can be time-consuming to organize to ensure that a good mix of interested parties is present.	Usually most effective to host such an event after either interviews or focus groups to provide information on the type of issues that may be raised.
Media/radio interviews	Short programmes usually aimed at discussing or responding to narrow or focused issues.	Avenue to reach many people.	It is not possible to control the questions that will be asked. Unless the radio station permits listeners to phone in, it is difficult to have any type of exchange.	Keep messages sharp, clear, and simple. Give these interviews if some major decision is being considered that would be of interest to the broad community.
Citizen advisory groups or community liaison groups	Group made of people from outside the organization with various interests and expertise that meet periodically to give advice on environmental issues from the point of view of an interested party.	Investigate issues, put forward suggestions. Two-way exchange of information. Shows that the organization is willing to work with people. Helps maintain the visibility of the organization in the community.	Can have limited power. May not represent all interests, different levels of expertise. Information not always passed on to community. Advisory group members may get out of touch with those they represent.	Have to represent full range of interests. The role and authority of the group has to be clearly defined. Can have pre-determined life span. Members have to communicate with the community.
Help desk	Phone advice and information available to interested parties about the environmental and other aspects of products.	Provides an opportunity for interested parties to ask and receive responses to specific questions about products.	Calls may cover any subject. Callers may not always listen carefully to answers and may therefore misinterpret responses.	Staff have to be well trained and well informed about environmental aspects of the organization's activities, products and services. If responding to difficult questions, it is sometimes better to offer to get back to the caller or to send a written response.

Table 2 (continued)

Technique	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses	Keep in mind
Presentation to groups	Talks to interested groups, usually held at the group's regular meeting place. A short presentation followed by a question and answer session. May be used for internal or external groups.	Groups can be targeted, information can be tailored to meet group needs, and information may be passed to others. The host group may do some of the work (e.g. inviting people). Useful for indigenous communities.	Potential for hostile audience reaction. If used alone, can fail to reach sections of the community.	Use them to develop working relationships. Do not exclude non-supportive groups. Provide written material to be considered before the meeting. Leave written material to be taken home.
Interested party dinners/sustainable business dinners	Series of group meetings bringing together different interested parties either to launch a report or discuss sustainability.	Participants benefit from sharing their views (e.g. enjoy a meal). First-hand interested parties' views are obtained. Constructive atmosphere in which to discuss sustainability.	Difficulties in selecting guests and steering the conversation to sustainability.	Can be of different sizes, e.g. large with regional and local interested parties, or small meetings with less than 10 participants.
Theatre presentation	Use of a theatrical format to present environmental information to internal or external interested parties.	Can attract the attention of interested parties. Can reach interested parties who may not read written materials.	It may be difficult to develop presentations that are appropriate for groups with varying levels of knowledge, understanding and interest.	Presentations have to be well done, lively and have to avoid preaching to the audience. Consider using professional actors.

Table 3 — Other communication approaches and tools

Technique	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses	Keep in mind
Cooperative projects	Projects carried out jointly by an organization and groups of interested parties.	Can build trust and co-operation through working together to achieve a mutual goal.	Interested parties may have unrealistic expectations about the input and resources that an organization can provide.	In developing co-operative projects, be sure to define clearly the project goals, and the roles, responsibilities and resources to be provided by each participant.

Table 3 (continued)

Technique	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses	Keep in mind
Sustainability agreement	An agreement reached by an organization and a community to mutually commit to sustainable development.	Assists in building relationships between a community and an organization that will foster environmental communication and interaction. Benefits can include having the organization recognized as a leader committed to improving quality of life and the environment.	Time and resources are needed to maintain community relationships.	If an organization fails to meet its commitment, its reputation may suffer because of the visibility of the agreement.
Art exhibitions	Display of artworks organized around environmental themes.	Encourages involvement of external and/or internal interested parties who may not be attracted by more conventional approaches.	May be time consuming to organize.	Exhibitions can be available for viewing during hours when people have time to attend, e.g. evenings and weekends.

7.2.2 Defining responsibilities and involvement (internal and external)

The responsibilities of top management should include the following:

- being involved in the environmental communication processes to become familiar with the environmental impacts of their strategies, planning, products and services, processes and further activities, as well as with the requirements of the interested parties;
- taking a leading role in promoting an internal environment that stimulates and acknowledges those who are actively involved with environmental communication;
- encouraging regular communication to all employees on the initiatives and results of environmental communication.

Specific responsibility for gathering information for environmental communication should be assigned so that there is coordination between the individual(s) responsible for formulating this information and individuals who are responsible for conducting outreach and communication. In small organizations, the responsibility for an environmental communication activity may be assigned to one individual.

When environmental communication is carried out by internal or external communication professionals in collaboration with other professionals from various areas, the organization should consider training for its appropriate staff on aspects related to communication (media training, public speech, consultation techniques, etc.) and also on environmental issues that are relevant to the organization and to its interested parties.

The best results can come from ongoing informal dialogue between the organization and interested parties. In addition to training, developing a culture of openness, individual responsibility and participation can help in facilitating a proactive and constructive dialogue with interested parties.

7.2.3 Tracking input from interested parties

The organization may develop or refer to a logbook or electronic register that records relevant contact between the organization and interested parties. Such a record should include, at a minimum, relevant contact information for the interested party and the date and nature of the past interaction or communications, taking into account any data protection requirements. Tracking and maintaining such information can allow the organization:

- to recall the history of specific interested party communication, inquiries or concerns;
- to understand the nature of various interested party engagements over time;
- to improve an organization's effectiveness in developing future communication and in following up and addressing the concerns of specific interested parties as needed.

7.2.4 Planning for environmental communication activities on environmental crises and emergencies

Although environmental communication is important at all times, it is particularly critical during environmental crises and emergencies. The organization should identify any potential crises and emergencies and plan the appropriate environmental communication. The planning should address relevant information for response to both potential situations and actual crises and emergency situations.

The credibility of the communication is based on the quality of planning and the organization's response. Any deficiencies in planning or processes are likely to be highlighted under such circumstances. Even if there is a very small margin for error, significant consequences may result from inappropriate or poorly executed communication.

Detailed planning for an environmental communication activity during crises and emergencies is crucial in order to:

- keep affected communities informed about measures being taken and aware of exposure risks;
- reduce or avoid health problems with workers and nearby residents;
- reduce or avoid impacts on the environment;
- ensure that authorities are kept informed as appropriate.

Such planning can greatly reduce the consequences that undesired events might have on the organization's reputation among customers and residents of local communities.

The media can play an important communication role during environmental crises or emergencies. The organization should recognize the importance of effective, transparent communication with the media. The media may be kept informed about environmental issues related to the organization so that it has an informed background and contacts to draw on in case of an emergency.

Practical help box 9 — Considerations in planning for an environmental communication activity related to crises or emergencies

Planning should include:

- potential incident/accident scenarios;
- possible exposed population and its vulnerability;
- mitigating actions that the organization has in place;
- environmental impacts that may be expected locally or on a larger scale;
- media and the methods that can be used to inform the affected population about what to do;
- messages designed for specific audiences;
- infrastructure that can be used in the response process;
- assigning in advance the responsibilities and authority for communicating during crises and keeping interested parties informed;
- guidance or requirements from authorities and industrial trade or professional associations;
- advanced training and or exercises;
- reaction to negative media coverage;
- relevant legal requirements and consequences.

Some examples of environmental communication activities during crises and emergencies are to:

- hold a press conference to discuss the situation;
- host a community meeting to discuss what happened, allowing an opportunity for interested parties to express concerns, and for the organization to hear concerns and respond directly, and provide information on the organization's response, current status and follow-up and preventative measures;
- keep the media informed about current status, updated information and follow up activities;
- coordinate responses with local and other appropriate authorities;
- take initiatives to identify the root cause of the accident, prevent reoccurrence and report on progress;
- provide information to interested parties on where to ask questions, express concerns, and obtain information.

7.2.5 Establishing a communication plan

Based on the guidance given in [7.2](#), it is helpful to create a communication plan. A communication plan is also a practical tool to demonstrate fulfilment of the requirements in ISO 14001 regarding communication. A communication plan should include:

- what to communicate, when and how;
- target groups for the activities;
- responsibilities;
- goals and objectives for the activities;

- needs for actions (especially urgent needs) to responses from interested parties;
- plan(s) for follow-up and evaluation.

The communication plan should include communication about the organization as well as its products and services.

NOTE More guidance on communication requirements in an environmental management system is provided in ISO 14004.

7.3 Performing an environmental communication activity

7.3.1 Collecting and evaluating data

Material for use in environmental communication should be documented so that it can be organized, maintained and easily used by those interested in the information. The document management system may be able to provide fast access to information, especially information to be used in response to environmental crises and emergencies.

Evaluation of the data should include checks for accuracy, consistency, reliability and applicability. The collected data may be presented as information in a form suitable for its intended use and target group.

NOTE See ISO 14033 for further guidance on quantitative environmental information.

7.3.2 Conducting environmental communication activities

The way an environmental communication activity is conducted depends on the nature of the communication, the needs of the target groups, the organization's objectives for the communication, and the preferred approach of the organization. There should be considerable flexibility and variation in the specific details of the communication. A written communication, for example, can be disseminated in a variety of different forms; an open house can be structured in many different ways.

When communicating with target group(s), an organization may:

- a) designate those working for the organization, or on its behalf, to serve as spokespeople and media sources;
- b) provide spokespeople with speaker or media training before they undertake their ongoing communication roles;
- c) consider whether to use an independent third party or consultant to produce information that can be provided;
- d) actively promote and respond to input and feedback;
- e) try to provide advance notice of publication for review and consideration by interested parties;
- f) ensure that the timing of the communication is appropriate for its internal business cycles, external events, interested parties' availability and interest;
- g) consider whether to use a facilitator or mediator;
- h) avoid jargon, overly technical and inconsistent information;
- i) be open to a variety of possible communication approaches informed by the interests and needs of targets group(s).

If the environmental communication activity involves the discussion of information provided by the organization, the organization should ensure that all target group(s) receive the information sufficiently in advance of the date for discussion to permit adequate time for review and consideration. An organization should take into account that voluntary groups may require more time to review

information than a business or government body. The following hypothetical case highlights the implications of such a situation.

EXAMPLE Case 3: Conducting environmental communication activities, using various approaches and tools.

In the mid-1990s, a research facility experienced several environmental incidents related to groundwater contamination that resulted in intense reaction from neighbours, activists, elected officials and regulators. Under new management, the facility implemented an environmental management system, ultimately receiving ISO 14001 registration. To meet the requirement in ISO 14001 to “consider processes for external communication on its significant environmental aspects”, the facility launched a strong external environmental communications programme to regain interested party trust.

Using a focus group of interested parties, employees and management, recommendations were developed and formalized in a community involvement plan. One of the key aspects of the plan was recognition of the value of community involvement in decision-making at the facility and the availability of information (good and bad news) in a timely, clear and accurate manner.

Environmental communication at the facility is now conducted at several levels. General, big picture information is disseminated (and feedback requested) through newsletters, surveys, mailing lists, websites and community meetings. For more detailed information and input into decision-making, a community advisory committee was formed, consisting of representatives of 32 local groups. The committee meets regularly to bring issues to the facility and to provide feedback on decisions it is considering. To work with regulators and elected officials, an executive roundtable was created, which serves a similar function as the community advisory committee. Additionally, employees are encouraged to reach out to the community through programmes such as a speaker's bureau for presentations to community groups and an envoy programme to fulfil requests for information from individuals and local organizations.

Overall, the communication programme has been a success. The facility brings new issues to the advisory groups for decisions and, through contingency plans, informs them of developing issues of concern. Formal systems ensure receipt and response to requests for information. The facility was also recognized with a major national environmental communications award.

7.3.3 Recording and responding to feedback

A valuable part of communication is the feedback that is received from the target group(s). By evaluating their reaction, the organization can verify how the communication was received and whether the target group(s) understood the communication. When the communication has succeeded in these respects, there is still a need for the organization to obtain feedback from the different target group(s) and then to respond, showing that the organization understands their views, is interested in them, and will consider them.

If an organization's communication activities have failed in any of these respects, a quick reaction may be necessary. A failure in the communication process may be remedied by providing clearer information through more direct access and discussion. A negative reaction to a communication by some of the target groups may be more serious: it may foreshadow opposition to the organization's activities. The reaction should be investigated to provide a full understanding of the concerns. At best, the issue can be resolved by improved communication; alternatively, it may require a modification of the activities to address the concerns. At worst, the proposal may be delayed, pending resolution of the concerns, or even dropped in the face of major opposition.

Organizations issuing environmental reports or other documents for public information should include forms for feedback within the reports. This feedback can assist the organization in continually improving the quality of the reports issued.

Each communication activity should include a definition of not only the information the organization is trying to give but also the information it is hoping to gain. The resources allocated to the activity can include details of how the feedback will be handled. Feedback gained through opinion research may be handled internally. However, an organization undertaking two-way communication has to be prepared to seriously consider the feedback and to provide a prompt response. This does not mean that an organization always needs to change its activities based on this feedback, but the interested parties need to be assured that they have been heard.

Organizations should use the feedback they receive to evaluate the effectiveness of their communication activities and to refine and improve future efforts.

7.4 Evaluating environmental communication

An organization should allow adequate time for the environmental communication to be effective. The time needed depends on the nature of the communication, the number of interested parties and their concerns, and the type of media used. The organization should review and assess the effectiveness of its environmental communication. In evaluating the effectiveness of the communication, the organization should consider the following:

- a) its environmental communication policy;
- b) how it has applied the principles of environmental communication;
- c) whether its objectives and targets have been achieved;
- d) the quality and appropriateness of the information provided to target groups and the environmental communication activity;
- e) the way in which the environmental communication was conducted;
- f) the responses of interested parties;
- g) whether the communication programme has fostered effective and meaningful dialogue with target groups;
- h) whether the procedures and approach were transparent;
- i) whether the environmental communication addressed the needs of the target groups;
- j) whether target groups know that they were heard and were made aware of how their input was to be used;
- k) whether target groups understood the purpose and content of the environmental communication;
- l) whether appropriate follow up was provided for the issues raised by target groups.

The results of the evaluation can provide a basis for top management's review of its environmental communication policy.

Practical help box 10 — Environmental communication indicators

To monitor whether the previously defined environmental communication goals and objectives have been achieved, the organization should make use of environmental communication indicators. These should be carefully chosen or designed to allow tracking of critical steps and interests of various parties.

Like other indicators used by an organization, those dedicated to environmental communication should be simple, precise, easy to understand and relevant to the process they are related to. A good set of environmental communication indicators should represent quantitative as well as qualitative information.

Some examples are:

- number of visitors per unit of time to parts of the organization engaged in environmental activities (e.g. visitors/year);
- number of letters/phone calls/emails per unit of time received from interested parties about environmental issues, (e.g. emails per month) and analysis of content being negative or positive;
- number or rate of complaints about certain environmental aspects, activities or issues;
- number of award applications;
- number of awards received;
- number of articles published by media;
- number of visitors to the organization's environmental information pages on its website (e.g. visitors per month);
- rate of response to an environmental survey/questionnaire;
- number of outreach activities conducted, and analysis of which ones were most effective according to the target groups via an evaluation survey/questionnaire.

7.5 Conducting management review and planning revisions

Top management may wish to review and revise its environmental communication policy, or its other policies and strategies based on the result of the evaluations described in 7.4. Reviews should include assessing opportunities for improvement and the need for changes to the environmental communication, including the environmental communication policy, strategy and activities. An organization should ensure broad involvement of those working for the organization or on its behalf.

In determining the need for revisions, an organization may:

- a) assess the adequacy of resources provided for the environmental communication;
- b) assess the data collection process;
- c) distinguish between improvements necessary to the information provided to interested parties (including the process of developing the information) versus the communication process (including approaches taken).

When deciding whether or not to make a change to environmental communication policy, strategy and activities, the organization should consider how the interested parties may perceive the change and communicate the reasons to them.

Annex A (informative)

Environmental communication within the ISO 14000 family

Environmental communication is an important feature of the whole ISO 14000 family of standards (including ISO 19011). This annex identifies the clauses, subclauses and annexes where environmental communication activities are referenced, required or advised, and where this document may provide help when implementing the other standards. This annex can also be used when implementing this document by providing users with applicable references to communication elements in other relevant environmental management standards.

Table A.1 — Environmental communication within the ISO 14000 family

ISO document	Clause, subclause or annex	Title
ISO 14001:2015	5.2	Environmental policy
	6.2	Environmental objectives and planning to achieve them
	7.1	Resources
	7.2	Competence
	7.3	Awareness
	7.4	Communication
	8.1	Operational planning and control
	8.2	Emergency preparedness and response
ISO 14004:2016	9.3	Management review
	5.2	Environmental policy
	6.2.2	Establishing environmental objectives
	7.1	Resources
	7.4	Communication
	7.5	Documented information
	8.1.2	Identifying needs for operational control
	8.2	Emergency preparedness and response
ISO 14015:2001	9.3	Management review
	10.2	Nonconformity and corrective action
ISO 14015:2001	4.2.5	Assessment plan
	5	Reporting
ISO 14020:2000	3	Objective of environmental labels and declarations
	4.5	Principle 4
	4.9	Principle 8
	4.10	Principle 9
ISO 14021:2016	4	Objective of self-declared environmental claims
	5.9	Other information or claims
	6.5	Access to information
ISO 14024:2018	4	Objective of Type I environmental labelling
	6.2	Consultation with interested parties
	6.6	Reporting and publication

Table A.1 (continued)

ISO document	Clause, subclause or annex	Title
ISO 14025:2006	4	Objectives
	5.5	Involvement of interested parties
	5.9	Transparency
	6.5	Involvement of interested parties
ISO 14026:2017	4	Objectives
	5	Principles
	6	Communication requirements
	7	Requirements for the use of data to support the communication
	8	Footprint communication programme requirements
	9	Verification requirements
ISO 14031:2013	4.1	General overview
	4.3.4	Evaluating information (Review)
	4.3.5	Reporting and communicating
	4.4	Reviewing and improving EPE (Act)
	A.2.4	Methods for identifying the views of interested parties
ISO 14033:2019	4	Use of quantitative environmental information
	A.2	Examples of realizing the objective
ISO 14040:2006	4.1	Principles of LCA
	6	Reporting
	7.3	Critical review processes
ISO 14044:2006	4.2.2	Goal of the study
	5	Reporting
	6.3	Critical review by panel of interested parties
ISO 14045:2012	6	Reporting and disclosure of [ecoefficiency] results
	7	Critical review [of ecoefficiency results]
ISO 14046:2014	6	[water footprint] Reporting
	7	[water footprint] Critical review
ISO/TS 14048:2002	4.2	Reporting
ISO 14050:2009	All	Terms and definitions
ISO/TR 14062:2002	5.4	Communication
ISO 14064-1:2018	4	Principles
	9	GHG reporting
ISO 14064-2:2019	4	Principles
	5	Introduction to GHG projects
	6.2	Describing the project
	6.13	Reporting the GHG project
ISO 14064-3:2019	4	Principles
ISO/TS 14072:2014	5	Organization life cycle assessment
	6	Reporting [of OLCA results]

Table A.1 *(continued)*

ISO document	Clause, subclause or annex	Title
ISO 19011:2018	5.5	Implementing audit programme
	6.4.4	Communicating during audit
	6.4.10	Conducting closing meeting
	6.5.2	Distributing audit report
	A.15	Visiting the auditee's location
	A.16	Auditing virtual activities and locations
	A.17	Conducting interviews

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