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Environmental management — Environmental communication — Guidelines and examples

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Foreword

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Introduction

Over the past two decades or so, communication on environmental values, actions and performance has become an essential activity of organizations, because of increased public concern and interest and governmental activities related to the environment. Organizations all over the world are increasingly confronted with the need to express their views, present and explain the environmental implications of their activities, products and services. There is also a growing need to listen to, and incorporate the views and requirements of interested parties as part of environmental communication.

Organizations have a need to obtain and provide information about and respond to environmental issues, concerns and programs. This is influenced by factors such as the organization's geographic location and distribution, size and types of activities. Reasons for communication may include:

- the initiative of the organization itself (e.g., a press release, a sustainability report, an open house for neighbours, a meeting with suppliers and customers on the environmental aspects of a new product);
- 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 introduction of a new product or service;
- environmental risk management;
- a request for information by employees or investors, a government agency, a community group, a customer or supplier, or any other interested party;
- a regulatory requirement;
- response to complaints from interested parties.

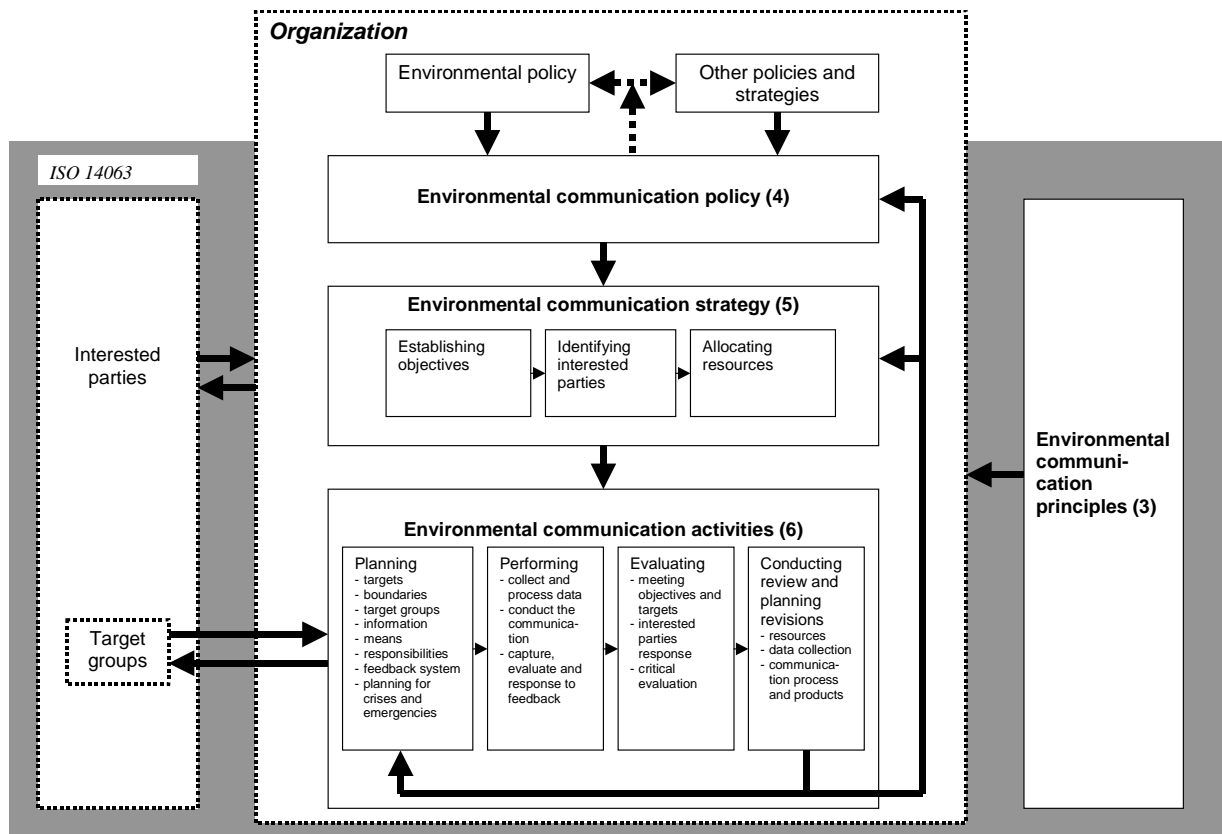
Environmental communication is broader than environmental reporting. It has many purposes and takes many forms, from limited to full participation, and many approaches, from an open house to a written report. When properly done, any particular approach can be successful if it meets the needs of the organization and interested parties.

Ad hoc communication occurs when an opportunity presents itself that allows for an unplanned exchange. For example, a facility manager attends a community event and answers their questions about activities of the organization. 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. Two-way communication occurs with an exchange of information and ideas among the organization and interested parties. Engagement with interested parties provides an opportunity for an organization to learn of their issues and concerns and may lead to knowledge being gained by both sides and influence opinions and perceptions. In participatory decision-making (including effective feedback), an organization collaborates with interested parties in making decisions that affect the organization and/or the local community.

The processes used and the content of environmental communication will vary with objectives and circumstances of the organization. Environmental communication is not an end in itself; it is the process of communicating environmental information to build trust, credibility, linkages, and partnerships, to raise awareness, and to be used for decision making.

The most effective environmental communication process involves ongoing contact by the organization with internal and external interested parties.

Figure 1 shows the interrelationships and flow of the environmental communication process.



NOTE 1 Titles in bold and numbered refer to the chapters in this International Standard.

NOTE 2 Dotted lines indicates the organization and interested parties and full lines indicates the activities and results.

Figure 1 – Environmental communication according to ISO 14063

Environmental communication often results in many benefits, such as:

- providing information that helps interested parties understand an organization's commitment to the environment;
- contributing to improvements in environmental performance of an organization's activities, products and services, as well as to the organization's progress toward sustainability;
- building trust, creating dialogue, and enhancing mutual understanding of interested parties' needs and concerns;
- facilitating understanding of an organization's environmental performance and environmental management systems, increasing awareness and dialogue about its environmental policy, objectives and targets, and relevant achievements;
- consolidating and reinforcing environmental values within an organization's culture and increasing the importance of environmental issues within the organization;
- reducing the concern that internal personnel or nearby communities will be exposed to hazards in the event of an emergency situation; and
- reducing the share price volatility and improving financial stability through increased shareholder confidence.

Environmental communication is one of the critical issues to be dealt with by any organization, with or without an environmental management system (EMS) in place. The existence of an effective EMS within the organization may allow for more effective and systematic management of environmental communication activities and may lead to improved results. However, environmental communication is not only a question of organization and management but also of the organization's values. To ensure successful communication processes it is important for the organization to consider itself a partner within society and to take environmental expectations of interested parties seriously.

Environmental management — Environmental communication — Guidelines and examples

1 Scope

This international standard gives guidance to an organization on general principles, policy, strategy, methods and practices, relating to both internal and external environmental communication. The standard seeks to utilize 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.

This international standard is not intended for use as a specification standard for certification or registration purposes or for the establishment of any other environmental management system conformity requirements. It may be used in combination with any other standard within the ISO 14000 series or on its own.

NOTE For environmental labels and declarations related to products, see the ISO 14020 series.

2 Terms and definitions

2.1 environmental communication

set of interrelated or interacting activities that an organization conducts to provide and obtain information, and to engage in dialogue with internal and external **interested parties** (2.3) on environmental issues, aspects and performance

2.2 environmental communication policy

overall intentions and directions of an organization related to its **environmental communication** (2.1) as formally expressed by top management

NOTE The environmental communication policy provides a framework for action and for the setting of environmental communication objectives and targets and can be a separate policy or part of other policies within the organization.

2.3 interested party

person or group concerned with or affected by the environmental performance of an organization (ISO/DIS 14001)

2.4 target group

interested party (2.3) or parties selected as the focus of an organization's environmental communication activity

2.5 environmental communication objective

overall environmental communication goal consistent with the **environmental communication policy** (2.2) that an organization sets itself to achieve as part of its environmental communication strategy

2.6 environmental communication target

detailed performance requirement, applicable to the organization, that arises from the **environmental communication objectives** (2.5) and that needs to be set and met in order to achieve those objectives

3 Principles of environmental communication

An organization shall apply the following principles to its environmental communication.

3.1 Transparency

The processes, procedures, methods, data sources, and assumptions used in the environmental communication shall be available to all participants. Interested parties shall be aware of their role in environmental communication.

3.2 Appropriateness

Information provided in environmental communication shall be relevant to interested parties, using formats, language and media that meets their interests and needs, enabling them to participate in an inclusive way. Information shall be relevant to and reflect the relative importance of the environmental issues.

3.3 Credibility

Information shall be provided in an honest and fair manner and be truthful, accurate, traceable, reproducible, substantive and not misleading to interested parties. Information and data shall be developed using recognised and reproducible methods and indicators.

3.4 Responsiveness

Environmental communication shall be sensitive to the needs of interested parties. The queries and concerns of interested parties shall be responded to in a full and timely manner. Interested parties shall be made aware of how their queries and concerns have been dealt with.

3.5 Clarity

Environmental communication shall use understandable approaches and language to meet the needs of interested parties and to minimise ambiguity.

4 Environmental communication policy

The environmental communication policy expresses the intentions and directions of the top management of the organization and should be consistent with the principles in chapter 3. It should clearly state the:

- organization's commitment to engage in dialogue with interested parties;
- organization's commitment to disclose information about its environmental performance;
- significance of internal and external environmental communication in the organization; and
- commitment to implement the policy and provide the necessary resources.

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

The environmental communication policy should be set by top management, which should then promote and express its commitment to 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 policies of the organization. Subsequently all levels of management should implement the policy and provide input for the formulation and modifications 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 communicating about environmental issues, environmental aspects and environmental performance. An organization's vision, mission, values and culture should play a fundamental role in developing a policy on environmental communication. It is important that the organization makes a policy

commitment to reflect at a local, regional and/ or national cultural characteristics in its environmental communication activities, where applicable.

Other important factors that should be considered when developing an environmental communication policy, may include:

- Shareholders expectations;
- Corporate governance;
- Organization's size;
- Organizational infrastructure;
- Environmental management system;
- Consideration of environmental aspects and impacts;
- Public's "right to know";
- Market and brand strategies;
- Regulations or legislation regarding disclosure of environmental information;
- The organization's business sector and its product or service portfolio;
- Interaction with related aspects like health and safety and other sustainability approaches; and
- Local, national and international voluntary codes of ethics/conduct.

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

5 Environmental communication policy implementation

5.1 Environmental communication strategy

The organization's management should develop a strategic framework to implement its environmental policy. The strategy should 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 given 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, as such, shall be aligned with any other elements of any management systems, policies, strategies or relevant activities.

When developing the environmental communication strategy the questions below can be helpful:

- Why is the organization engaging in an environmental communication process and what are its purposes (e.g., contribute to the reputation of the organization and to a better dialogue with interested parties)?
- What are the main issues to be covered, messages to be conveyed, and communication and consultation techniques, approaches, tools and channels to be used?
- Who is involved in the environmental communication (e.g., internal or external participants, general public, local communities)?
- What are the time frames (short, medium or long term) to implement the strategy?
- How will the strategy build in appropriate involvement of and co-ordination between the environmental managers, interested parties, individual(s) responsible for environmental issues and individual(s) that are responsible for the organization's internal and external communication?

- What are the geographic boundaries (e.g. local, national, international) for the strategy?

Once defined, the strategy should be approved by the top management of the organization, and then used to develop environmental communication activities.

5.2 Elements of an environmental communication strategy

5.2.1 Establishing environmental communication objectives

An organization should understand why it is communicating, who are the interested parties and what are the issues covered by the communication. When setting its environmental communication objectives, an organization should ensure that they are consistent with its environmental communication policy, environmental communication principles, and take account of the views of internal and external interested parties.

Useful questions in setting objectives include:

- What are the priority issues?
- What are the desired results?
- Are the objectives understandable so further explanation is unnecessary?

Objectives provide the basis for evaluating the effectiveness of environmental communication.

Priority issues may include:

- satisfying regulatory requirements;
- influencing public policy on environmental issues;
- providing information and build awareness of interested parties about the environmental activities and performance of the organization;
- meeting the environmental information expectations of interested parties;
- establishing ongoing dialogue on environmental matters;
- minimising 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; and
- stimulating environmental innovation and creativity;

Examples of objectives and their relation to targets are provided in 6.2.1 help box 3.

5.2.2 Identifying interested parties

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

Later, the organization will more precisely identify target groups for environmental communication activities.

Practical help box 1 – Examples of interested parties

Examples of interested parties include:

- Customers and consumers;
- Past, present and future employees;
- Suppliers, contractors and distributors;

- Competitors;
- Neighbours and local community;
- Communities along the supply chain;
- Academics and researchers;
- Media;
- Public authorities;
- Legislators and regulators;
- Insurance companies;
- Banks and financial/investment community;
- Shareholders;
- Politicians and opinion leaders;
- Non-governmental organizations;
- Rating agencies; and
- Professionals involved in environmental issues.

5.2.3 Considering Resource Issues

An organization's environmental communication activities are dependent upon available resources devoted to it. Whether the organization is considering a single environmental communication activity, such as developing and releasing an environmental report or hosting an open house, or a regular series of environmental communication activities, it will need to allocate responsibilities and resources to the effort. This may be as simple as identifying a lead and small team to respond to an issue or management priority. It may also involve full-time responsibilities on the part of employees in the communication and other department. Whatever the case, the environmental communication strategy should include human, technical and financial resources, designated responsibilities and defined actions. In the case of human resources, employees' experiences and training needs should be considered.

An organization may need to clarify what is possible given its set of resources so that it can best and most realistically meet the expectations of interested parties, both within the organization (managers and employees) and outside the organization (e.g. customer, community groups).

6 Environmental communication activities

In implementing the environmental communication policy, an organization should undertake a range of environmental communication activities. It may use existing or new communication methods and practices to communicate on its environmental issues, as appropriate. Following the environmental communication strategy and objectives, an environmental communication activity should be developed encompassing issues, geographical boundaries and interested parties.

Practical help box 2 – Planning an environmental communication activity

In planning an environmental communication activity the organizations should answer the following questions:

- Does this activity provide an opportunity to address multiple issues in depth?
- Does this activity offer a great potential to reach our target group?
- Is this activity easy to update?
- Does this activity have a high likelihood of creating two-way communication, if appropriate?
- Is this activity relatively easy to implement, and does it provide for information transfer at relatively low cost?

- Does this activity address target group interests?
- Is this activity a good vehicle for education?
- Is this activity an effective way to get publicity?
- Does this activity contain credible and trust building information?
- Can this activity establish a relationship and a consensus with interested parties?
- Does this activity offer the opportunity for direct interaction with the target group?
- Is this activity constructed in a way that tailors the information to the target group?
- Does this activity offer the option of sharing views with target group?
- Is this activity creating a constructive atmosphere?
- Does this activity use simple and understandable language?
- Does this activity focus on the key issues?

Not all questions apply to every activity, but they cover the broad range of aspects to be considered.

6.1 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 issues the organization should consider include:

- existing environmental communication activities and commitments;
- the identification and understanding of issues of concern to interested parties’;
- the expectations and perceptions of the organization held by interested parties;
- environmental awareness of interested parties, such as local communities;
- the communication media and activities that have proven to be the most effective in communicating with interested parties in similar situations;
- identification of the opinion leaders and their influence on issues related to environmental communication;
- the public image of the organization on a specific issue;
- the latest developments and trends on environmental issues related to the organization’s specific activities, products and services; and
- financial implications.

A variety of tools are available to assist in the situational analysis. Examples can be found in section 6.2.5(Table 1).

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 also impose other costs on an organization, e.g., damage to image. The accompanying box highlights the implications of such a situation.

CASE EXAMPLE: 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. The manager and his colleagues learned a lot from this experience.

6.2 Planning an environmental communication activity**6.2.1 Setting targets**

An organisation should decide what it intends to achieve with an environmental communication activity. Establishing clear, specific and measurable targets that are consistent with its communication policy and strategy will support each communication activity.

Educational activities for interested parties are an example of an objective, and for each interested party (target group) more specific targets in time and content can be formulated including, e.g., education means, different schedules, and geographic regions.

Specifying targets makes it possible for the organisation to evaluate the environmental communication activity and assess if the target is met. Setting targets will also make it possible and easier to judge whether a particular communication activity is likely to achieve what is intended.

Practical help box 3 – Examples of objectives and targets

objective: gaining acceptance of a significant change at a facility based upon discussions with community.

targets:

- Reach 90% of the homes with the brochure of the change;
- Reach 75% acceptance in survey with sample of the community at the public forum; and
- Conclude communication effort 3 months before proposed change starts.

objective: increasing customer awareness of the organization's environmental performance

targets:

- Reach 80% of the customers of product lines Delta and Gamma;
- Get feedback from 65% of the curve A customers from lines Delta and Gamma regarding their understanding of the organization's environmental performance level; and
- Conclude communication effort 2 months before the final version of the sustainability report is produced.

objective: improving 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.

targets:

- Reach 95% of raw material suppliers and 65% of consumption items suppliers;
- Get questionnaire return from 100% of raw material suppliers and 85% of consumption items suppliers;
and
- Provide conclusions to allow changes in procurement procedures by September 1st.

6.2.2 Target Groups

Interested parties differ from one another. 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 have to be flexible enough to accommodate and consider ways to address and respond to different and often conflicting demands from target groups, in particular those that are the most influential and may negatively impact the outcomes of an environmental communication activity.

When undertaking an environmental communication activity, the organization should 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 required information. 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.

6.2.3 Defining geographic scope of an environmental communication activity

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.

In a particular communication activity, an organization may have its focus on a local community or on 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 national or international focus, as well as by a local working group. 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.

6.2.4 Identifying environmental information

To be able to identify environmental issues, the organization should generate and provide knowledge on the environmental impacts and performances related to its strategies, planning, products and services, processes and further activities. Based on the targets of an environmental communication activity, appropriate quantitative and qualitative data and information can be selected or generated.

Practical help box 4 – Examples of information sources for a an environmental communication activity

There are many sources and types of information available within most organizations, such as:

- environmental policies, management practices, and performance measures, possibly available from an organization's environmental management system;
- 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;
- environmental performance evaluation data;
- routine regulatory reports;
- relevant financial and accounting data;
- information from community outreach activities;
- environmental aspects and impacts of activities, products and services;
- life cycle assessment of products and activities;
- record of compliance with legal obligations and other requirements;
- manuals and records of employee training on safe handling of materials;
- plans, records and guidance on emergency response, response to accidents;
- professional qualification records of the organization's employees responsible for environmental matters (managers, technicians, experts);
- registers of environmental indicators; and
- information on the organization's strategies and their environment implications.

Often, the 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 can be used to prepare materials or other types of communication in a form that is clear and appropriate for the relevant target groups. In some cases, difficulty collecting accurate data could lead to revision of the approach to achieving targets.

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.

NOTE ISO 14031 and 14032 provide guidance on development of environmental performance indicators.

CASE EXAMPLE: 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 should 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;
- Establish which environmental performance indicators should be addressed in the environmental report and the interested parties' priority ranking of these indicators;
- Assess the performance of the organizations against these indicators; and

- Produce an organization environmental performance profile and communicate the results back to the interested parties.

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

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

A workshop was also held, attended by 12 interested parties, to discuss and confirm the eleven 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 'traditional' environmental reports, e.g. "IT in pursuit of sustainable development". Issues dealt with in the environmental report were prioritised 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.

6.2.5 Describing environmental communication approaches and tools

An organization's approach to communication will be influenced by whether it wants to consult, understand, inform, persuade or engage interested parties. It is important to take into account that environmental communication is a dynamic process and that there is an ongoing change among interested parties and within organizations.

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

An organization should tailor the information it provides, consistent with initial planning, for interested parties. The information should:

- consider the social, educational, economic and political interests of interested parties;
- use appropriate language;
- make use of visual images or electronic media where appropriate; and
- 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.

Table 1 – Communication approaches and tools

Written communication 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 'brochure ware' on their Web sites, which misses the opportunity for interactivity (e.g. video, real data, email feedback).	Keep technical computer requirements to a low level - 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.	Hard work to produce and can be difficult to update (often annual). May provide information in a form that does not permit comparison with similar organizations.	Address external and internal interested parties' interests. Include difficulties and failures as well as successes.
Printed material (brochures and newsletters).	<i>Brochure</i> - A brief summary of the facility or specific project of interest, key issues and how people can participate. <i>Newsletter</i> - 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 must be researched. Use basic language. Use photos and maps. Be objective. Include contact name, telephone number and address.
Product information labels or declarations.	Description of the significant environmental issues associated with a product. Can be attached to product or available separately.	Can inform customers about the environmental attributes of a product.	May cause confusion because information is presented in brief form.	Form and content of environmental product labels should conform to the requirements of ISO 14020 series.

Written communication tools				
Technique	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses	Keep in Mind
Posters/ Displays.	A description of a project, highlighting issues and set up in a public place.	Provides general information at relatively low costs. Reaches many that may not participate otherwise.	Information giving, rather than receiving.	Keep to main points. Use photos and maps. Update regularly. Advertise the location of the display. Provide contact name and number.
Letters.	Letters on specific issues to and from named individuals.	Can address particular interested parties' needs. Quick and easy to produce.	Can be overly formal. Generally poor way to communicate complex information.	Reading level of recipients. Make one argument well.
Media/ Newspaper feature articles.	Explains features of a facility or project.	Can reach a large audience. Convenient for the public. Good vehicle for education.	May 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 nation-wide 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 will not cover unless the story is deemed newsworthy. May be edited to meet guidelines.	Avoid misrepresenting the organizations' environmental performance.
Media/ Advertising.	Paid for promotional material, e.g. a straight ad 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/program within which the advertisement appears.

Verbal communication tools				
Technique	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses	Keep in Mind
Public meetings.	A way to present information and exchange views. Addresses specific agenda or project aspect. 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.
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 constraining. Non community feel. 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.

Verbal communication tools				
Technique	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses	Keep in Mind
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 2 years).	Surveys may be labour intensive depending on the complexity of the questionnaire, the way questions are asked (personally or via web for example), 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.	Allows for direct interaction, Provides 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. Rely on staff knowledge and skills.	Must be well advertised. Staff must be well briefed. Project manager should be present. Issues raised must be recorded. Staff should not be defensive but be listening actively to interested parties' comments.
Workshops, Conferences, Dialogue Events.	Workshops, conferences, and dialogues are opportunities for a range of interested parties to discuss ideas, concerns, and issues.	They can be very productive and helpful in reaching consensus on issues with high priority.	They can be time-consuming to organize to ensure that a good mix of interested parties is present.	It is 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 programs 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.

Verbal communication tools				
Technique	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses	Keep in Mind
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 an interested party point of view.	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.	Must represent full range of interests. The role and authority of the group must be clearly defined. Should have pre-determined life span. Members must communicate with the community.
Help Desk.	Phone advice and information available to interested parties about the environmental and other aspects of products.	Provides 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 must be well-informed about environmental aspects of the organizations 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.
Presentation to groups.	Talks to interested groups, usually held at the group's regular meeting place. A short presentation is 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, information may be passed to others. The host group may do some of the work (inviting people). Useful for indigenous communities.	Potential for hostile audience reaction. If used alone can fail to reach sections of the community.	Use it to develop working relationships. Do not exclude non-supportive groups. Provide written material to be considered before 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 obtained. Constructive atmosphere in which to discuss sustainability.	Difficulties in selecting guests and steering 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.

Verbal communication tools				
Technique	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses	Keep in Mind
Theatre presentations.	Use of a theatrical format to present environmental information to internal or external interested parties.	Can attract attention of interested parties. Can reach interest 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 must be well done, lively and must avoid preaching to the audience.

Other communication approaches and tools				
Technique	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses	Keep in Mind
Co-operative 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.
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 should be available for viewing during hours when people have time to attend, e.g. evenings and weekends.

6.2.6 Responsibilities and involvement (internal and external)

Top management should be involved in the environmental communication processes to get 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. Top management should take a leading role in promoting an internal environment that stimulates and acknowledges those who are actively involved with environmental communication. Top management should encourage regular communication to all employees on the initiatives and results of environmental communication.

An organization should assign specific responsibility for developing information for an environmental communication activity. An organization should ensure that there is co-ordination between the individual(s) responsible for formulating the environmental information and individuals who are responsible for conducting outreach and communication. As such roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined. 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 may come from ongoing informal dialogue between the organization and interested parties. In addition to training, developing a culture of openness, individual responsibility, and participation will help in facilitating a proactive and constructive dialogue with interested parties.

6.2.7 Developing a system for interested parties input

The organization may want to develop or consult a logbook or electronic register that records contact between the organization and interested parties. Such record should provide the relevant contact, the date and nature of the inquiry, concern or past communication. Organizations without a formal record may consider creating such a mechanism to track and maintain such information in the future. This will allow an organization to:

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

6.2.8 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 foreseen 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 organizations' response. Any deficiencies in planning or processes are likely to be highlighted under such circumstances. There is a very small margin for error, and significant consequences may result from inappropriate or poorly executed communication.

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

- to keep affected communities informed about measures being taken and aware of exposure risks;
- to reduce or avoid health problems on workers and nearby residents; and
- to reduce or avoid impacts on the environment.

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 may play a decisive role during environmental crises or emergencies. The organization should recognize the importance of effective, transparent communication with the media. The media should 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 emergency.

Practical help box 5 – Considerations in planning for an environmental communication activity related to crises or emergencies

- foreseen 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;
- infrastructure that will be used in the response process;
- assigning in advance the responsibilities for communication during crises and making these known to the public;
- reaction to negative media coverage; and
- relevant legal requirements and consequences.

Examples of an environmental communication activities in crises and emergencies

- 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 status, update and follow-up activities;
- co-ordinate its responses with local and other appropriate authorities;
- take initiatives to identify the root cause of the accident, prevent reoccurrence and report on progress; and
- provide information to interested parties on where to ask questions, express concerns, and obtain information.

6.3 Performing a an environmental communication activity

6.3.1 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. Any system should 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, integrity and applicability. The collected data should be presented as information in a form suitable for its intended use and target group.

6.3.2 Conducting environmental communication activities

The way an environmental communication activity is conducted depends on the nature of the communication, the target group's needs or requirements, the organization's objectives for the communication, and the preferred approach of the organization. There may 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, etc.

When communicating with interested parties, an organization should:

- designate individuals from within the organization or working on its behalf to serve as spokespeople and media sources;
- provide spokespeople with speaker or media training before they undertake their communication roles;
- consider whether to use an independent third party or consultant to produce information that will be provided;
- actively promote and respond to input and feedback;
- try to provide advance notice of publication for review and consideration by interested parties;
- ensure that the timing of the communication is appropriate for its internal business cycles, external events, interested parties availability and interest;
- consider whether to use a facilitator or mediator;
- avoid jargon, overly technical or inconsistent information; and
- be open to a variety of possible communication approaches informed by the interests and needs of interested parties;

If the environmental communication activity will involve the discussion of information provided by the organization, ensure that all interested parties receive the information enough in advance of the date for discussion to permit adequate time for review and consideration. Take into account that voluntary groups may require more time to review information than a business or government body.

6.3.3 Recording and responding to feedback

A valuable part of communication is the feedback that is received from the target group(s). Only by identifying the reaction can the organization be sure that the communication has reached them, that they have received the intended information and that they have understood the communication. When the communication has succeeded in all of these aspects, there is still a need for the organization to obtain feedback from the different interested parties and then to respond, showing that the organization understands their views, is interested in them, and will consider them.

In the event a communication of, for example, an organization's activities have failed in any of these aspects, a quick reaction may be necessary. A failure in the communication process can be remedied by providing clearer information through more direct access and discussion. A negative reaction to the information by some of the target groups is 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 can include forms for feedback within the reports. The 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 should include how the feedback will be handled. Feedback gained through opinion research can be handled internally. However, an organization undertaking two-way communication must be prepared to seriously consider the feedback and to provide a prompt response. This does not mean that an organization needs to always 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.

6.4 Evaluating and improving 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:

- its environmental communication policy;
- the principles of environmental communication;
- whether its objectives and targets have been achieved;
- the quality and appropriateness of the information provided to target groups;
- the way in which the environmental communication was conducted;
- the responses of target groups;
- the communication program has fostered effective and meaningful dialogue with target groups;
- the procedures and approach were transparent; and
- the environmental communication addressed the target group's information needs;

It is therefore important for the organization to evaluate whether the communication achieved this aim. The organization should therefore consider whether:

- the communication program has fostered effective and meaningful dialogue with target groups;
- target groups know that they were heard and were made aware of how their input was to be used;
- target groups understood the purpose and content of the environmental communication; and
- appropriate follow up was given to the issues raised by target groups.

The results of the evaluation should inform top management's review of its environmental communication policy. In determining the need for revisions, an organization should:

- assess the adequacy of resources provided for the environmental communication;
- assess the data collection process; and
- 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 changing communication policies and methods the organization should consider how interested parties would perceive the changes and where appropriate should communicate the reasons to them. It may also be useful to obtain feedback from interested parties after implementation of new policies and/or methods.

Practical help box 6 – Environmental communication indicators

Situation 1: To monitor whether the previously defined environmental communication objectives and targets 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. e-mails/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 web site (e.g. visitors per month);
- rate of response to an environmental survey/ questionnaire; and
- number of outreach activities conducted and analysis of which ones were most effective according to the target groups via an evaluation survey/questionnaire;

Situation 2: An organization published its environmental report for five years.

During the first four years, the circulation increased from 5,000 to 18,000. The number of pages and the cost greatly increased. The number of accesses to the web site increased especially in the last two years. The target group was not specified in these periods.

Circulations and web site are as follows:

First year: 10 pages x 5,000

Second year: 20 pages x 8,000

Third year: 30 pages x 12,000

Fourth year: 50 pages x 18,000 + web site (general)

Fifth year: 40 pages x 12,000 + web site (general)

+ website (for target group)

In the beginning of the year 2003, the top management made the analysis of the interested parties and target groups for the report and strengthened the web site rather than printing media.

In the fifth year, the organization could reduce the pages, circulations, accordingly the cost, and increased the number of accesses to the web site.

6.5 Conducting management review and planning revisions

Top management should review on a regular basis the evaluations described in section 7.4. An organization should undertake to improve its environmental communication efforts by making appropriate revisions, ensuring broad involvement of staff.

In determining the need for revisions, an organization should:

- assess the adequacy of resources provided for the environmental communication;
- assess the data collection process; and
- 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 changing communication policies and methods the organization should consider how interested parties would perceive the changes and where appropriate should communicate the reasons to them. It may also be useful to obtain feedback from interested parties after implementation of new policies and/or methods.

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- Not company specific
- Available in English
- Globally applicable

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