**Guidelines for NRT-RRT Coordination**

**During a SONS or Nationally Significant Hazmat Incident**

**1. Purpose**

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance on (1) the role of the National Response Team (NRT) and (2) NRT-Regional Response Team (RRT) coordination procedures, during an oil Spill of National Significance (SONS) or a nationally significant release of hazardous substances, pollutants, or contaminants. It is expected that the NRT would be activated for such an incident and it will be important for NRT and RRT activities to be properly coordinated.

**2. Scope**

This guidance applies to an actual, or as appropriate, potential, SONS or nationally significant release of hazardous substances, pollutants, or contaminants, whether the response is conducted solely under the National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan (NCP) or under the Emergency Support Function (ESF) #10 – Oil and Hazardous Materials Response Annex of the National Response Framework (NRF).[[1]](#footnote-1)

The NCP has a definition of a SONS and identifies the officials with authority to make that determination. The determination of whether a *release of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant* is nationally significant for the specific purpose of implementing this guidance is made by the Incident-Specific (IS) NRT Chair, considering whether the release is similar to the NCP definition of a SONS and the NCP criteria for NRT activation below:

* §300.5 SONS definition – a spill that due to its severity, size, location, actual or potential impact on the public health and welfare or the environment, or the necessary response effort, is so complex that it requires extraordinary coordination of federal, state, local, and responsible party resources to contain and clean up the discharge.
* §300.110(j)(1) criteria for NRT activation, particularly, but not exclusively, if all three criteria are met --

(i) Exceeds the response capability of the region in which it occurs;

(ii) Transects regional boundaries; and/or

(iii) Involves a substantial threat to the public health or welfare of the United States or the environment, substantial amounts of property, or substantial threats to natural resources.

Appropriate parts of this guidance may also be followed for other oil or hazmat[[2]](#footnote-2) incidents that have the potential to generate significant media or political attention at the discretion of the NCP/ESF #10 lead agency for the response.

This guidance focuses primarily on matters related to NRT-RRT coordination and is not intended to address coordination between all entities, or coordination internal to EPA or USCG, during a SONS or nationally significant hazmat incident. For example, it is expected that the IS RRT Chair would establish procedures for coordinating and sharing information regarding NRT activities with RRT members and the On-Scene Coordinator (OSC), which may include the Unified Command (UC) for the response as appropriate.

**3. Definition of Incident-Specific NRT**

This guidance uses the term “incident-specific” (IS) NRT. For purposes of this guidance, an IS NRT is defined as an NRT that:

* Is convened for the purpose of addressing matters specific to an incident, rather than for standing NRT business;
* Is chaired by the lead agency for the incident response; and
* After the initial IS NRT activation (which includes all NRT member agencies), is comprised of those NRT member agencies that choose to remain involved in IS NRT matters. An NRT member may decide that his/her agency does not have a stake in a particular incident and ask the IS NRT Chair to be taken off the IS NRT distribution list after the initial activation.

**4. Role of NRT in a SONS or Nationally Significant Hazmat Incident**

Requests for an NRT activation for a SONS or nationally significant hazmat incident may come from various entities, including:

* On-Scene Coordinator (OSC) or Remedial Project Manager (RPM)
* RRT
* Other NRT members; or
* Senior official from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) or U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), such as an EPA Senior Agency Official (SAO) or USCG National Incident Commander (NIC) for a SONS, if designated.

These entities may identify a specific purpose for an NRT activation, such as a request for technical or resource support, though the NRT may also be activated to share general incident information for situational awareness and/or in anticipation of a specific request for support. In addition, the NRT may be activated as a result of the incident triggering the criteria under NCP section 300.110(j)(1) listed in Section 2 above.

The following is a list of potential roles for the NRT in a SONS or nationally significant hazmat incident. This list is derived primarily from the NCP (sections 300.110(k), 300.115(k), and 300.323); Section 2-6 of the NRT Operations Binder; experience from the Deepwater Horizon response; and interagency support that may be available from Emergency Support Functions (ESFs) under the NRF and Recovery Support Functions (RSFs) under the National Disaster Recovery Framework (NDRF). This is a list of potential roles; the specific role of the NRT for any given response should be determined on an incident-specific basis.

*Monitor Response Activities and Assist in Policy, Scientific, and Technical Matters*

* Monitor response
* Maintain situational awareness of significant interagency issues
* Address instances of insufficient national policy guidance on a matter before the RRT
* Address technical matters that cannot be resolved at the regional level
* Address questions concerning interpretation of the NCP
* Address disagreements on discretionary actions among RRT or NRT member agencies
* Evaluate reports from the OSC/RPM and recommend to the OSC/RPM, through the RRT, actions to combat the discharge or release
* Evaluate and recommend countermeasures and alternative or innovative technologies
* Assist in or conduct spill quantification and oil/hazmat fate analyses
* Assist in or conduct economic impact analysis and coordinate short-term federal economic recovery actions
* Assist in addressing issues related to the evaluation and mitigation of environmental and natural/cultural/historic resource impacts
* Address worker health and safety issues
* Address public health and safety issues (e.g., food safety, water safety, federal protective action recommendations)[[3]](#footnote-3)

*Provide Resource Assistance*

* Respond to requests for supplemental federal, state, local, or private response support that cannot be easily obtained at the RRT level, including specialized equipment or expertise
* Request other federal, state, and local government or private agencies to provide resources under their existing authorities to combat a discharge or release, or to monitor response operations
* Coordinate the supply of equipment, personnel, or technical advice to the affected region from other regions or districts
* Make recommendations to the lead agency regarding the deployment of resources at the national level when there is competition for resources
* Provide claims support
* Support the EPA SAO or USCG NIC during a SONS in carrying out SAO/NIC responsibilities related to coordination of federal, state, local, and international resources
* Provide national-level support for coordination of international offers of assistance (IOA), particularly if use of IOA is expected to be limited. For use of more significant IOA support, the lead agency would most likely establish components within its internal national and regional/district coordination and command structures to manage that assistance (which would include the Department of State and other federal agencies as needed), such as a national-level IOA unit in the NIC/SAO command/coordination structure and field-level IOA unit in the incident-specific Area Command or Incident Command.
* Assist in coordinating and integrating support from NRF ESFs and NDRF RSFs requested by a senior EPA/USCG official through the Department of Homeland Security. The NRT would work in conjunction with the Federal Resource Coordinator (FRC), who may be appointed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), if ESFs are activated and the Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator (FDRC), who may be appointed by FEMA or another federal agency, if RSFs are activated.[[4]](#footnote-4) For example, some types of support described in the “Monitor and Assist Response Activities” list above may be addressed by requesting activation of an ESF or RSF, such as addressing short-term economic analysis/recovery through activation of the Economic RSF. For longer-term recovery actions, however, it is expected the federal government would establish a separate interagency mechanism or body to coordinate federal recovery support. The primary NRT focus is on the response phase.

*Provide External Communications Assistance*

* Support state and community engagement efforts
* Support the EPA SAO or USCG NIC during a SONS in carrying out SAO/NIC responsibilities related to communications with affected parties, the public, Governors and mayors or other local government officials
* Coordinate the response to questions that require interagency input at the national level (e.g., from the White House, National Security Council/Domestic Resilience Group (DRG), Congress, Cabinet-level officials, or national-level private groups)

*Support Stafford Act ESF #10 Interagency Coordination*

* Facilitate and ensure adequate interagency coordination during NRF ESF #10 activations that involve significant interagency coordination

The NRT may establish IS NRT workgroups to accomplish its activities if appropriate. Section 5.B of these guidelines discusses the process for establishment of IS NRT workgroups.

**5. NRT-RRT Coordination Procedures**

**A. Initial NRT Activation**

The full NRT should be activated as soon as feasible after the lead agency determines that the incident has the potential to be designated as a SONS or nationally significant hazmat release.

NRT Operations Binder Sections 2-6, “Regional Guidelines for Activation of the NRT” and 2-7, “Activation Protocol,” should be followed to convene the initial NRT call/meeting, in addition to the following procedures.

***NRT Activation without Request from RRT/OSC***

* If the NRT is activated without a request from the RRT/OSC (e.g., at the request of the IS NRT Chair, other NRT member, or other EPA/USCG senior official), the NRT Executive Director should promptly notify the affected RRT Co-Chairs of the NRT activation.
* The RRT Co-Chairs or their representatives should participate if available, inform the OSC of the NRT activation, and invite the OSC to participate.

***NRT Activation at Request of RRT/OSC***

* If the NRT is activated at the request of the IS RRT Chair[[5]](#footnote-5) or OSC, the NRT Executive Director should coordinate with the IS RRT Chair and EPA/USCG RRT counterpart (*hereafter referred to as “counterpart”*) to schedule the initial NRT activation call/meeting.
* The IS RRT Chair and counterpart should participate and invite the OSC to participate.

***Additional Procedures for a SONS***

* If the activation is not at the request of a SAO/NIC, but a SAO/NIC has been designated, the NRT Executive Director should ensure that the EPA/USCG IS NRT Chair informs the SAO/NIC of the activation and the SAO/NIC should participate if available.
* The NRT Executive Director should ensure that NRT members and all RRT Co-Chairs receive a copy of any SONS designation and any appointment of an EPA SAO or USCG NIC.

**B. Establishment of Ongoing IS NRT-RRT Coordination Procedures**

As soon as possible after the initial NRT activation call, the NRT Executive Director should set up a call between the IS NRT Chair and Vice-Chair, and IS RRT Chair and counterpart, to discuss ongoing NRT-RRT coordination needs and determine the appropriate coordination procedures for the particular incident. They may agree to adjust the procedures over time as needed. Attachment 1 is a sample agenda for this first call, which can be used as a starting point for development of the IS agenda.

Once coordination procedures are determined, and when they are adjusted, the IS NRT Chair and IS RRT Chair should ensure their respective members are informed of the procedures.

***Coordination procedures:*** Coordination procedures between the IS NRT and IS RRT should minimally include the following:

***(i) Periodic coordination calls between IS NRT Chair/Vice Chair and IS RRT Chair/counterpart***

* IS NRT Chair/Vice Chair and IS RRT Chair/counterpart should determine whether to establish standing calls as the response continues, or to schedule calls on an as-needed basis.

***(ii) Cross-participation in NRT/RRT meetings and sharing meeting summaries***

* NRT Executive Director should ensure the IS RRT Chair/counterpart are invited to call into NRT meetings, and they or their representatives should participate if available.
* NRT Executive Director should email NRT meeting summaries to the IS RRT Chair/counterpart for distribution to IS RRT members. (If the IS RRT is given access to the IS NRT website, the IS RRT may decide that is sufficient. See Section 5.E of these guidelines.)
* IS RRT Chair should ensure a representative(s) of the IS NRT Chair is invited to call into RRT meetings and the representative should participate if available. The IS NRT Chair should ensure the name of the representative(s) is provided to the IS RRT Chair.
* IS RRT Chair should ensure RRT meeting summaries are emailed to the NRT Executive Director for distribution to the IS NRT. (If an IS RRT website is established and the IS NRT is given access, the IS NRT may decide that is sufficient.)

***(iii) Sharing respective schedules for any key standing IS meetings at the national/regional level***

* IS NRT Chair and IS RRT Chair should share the schedules for any key standing IS meetings at the national and regional levels, respectively. This will help avoid conflicts in scheduling other meetings under these procedures where there is a desire for participation from both the national and regional levels. For example, IS NRT meetings should not be scheduled at the same time as any standing IS RRT meetings if there is a desire for the IS RRT Chair/counterpart to participate in IS NRT meetings.

***(iv) Sharing information on websites for the incident***

* The lead agency for the response will identify the appropriate public website to use for the incident. The NRT Executive Director should ensure that the public website address is distributed to all NRT members and RRT Co-Chairs. The IS NRT Chair and IS RRT Chair should also share plans for establishment of a private IS NRT website and, if applicable, a private IS RRT website, and discuss respective access to those websites.

***(v) Sharing information on interagency coordination of public communications***

* The lead agency for the response will establish appropriate public communications procedures for the incident. The IS NRT Chair and IS RRT Chair should ensure they discuss and share with NRT/RRT members any plans for interagency coordination of public communications, such as establishment of local and/or national Joint Information Centers (JICs), or activation of the ESF #15 – External Affairs Annex of the NRF.
* For a SONS, further guidance on the coordination of messaging is expected to be provided in an upcoming NRT SONS communications strategy.

***(vi) Sharing information on coordination of interactions with Governors***

* The SAO/NIC for a SONS, or senior EPA/USCG official for a nationally significant hazmat incident, may coordinate conference calls/meetings with affected Governors that are intended to include other appropriate personnel from the affected states and responding federal agencies.[[6]](#footnote-6) In such cases, the lead agency should ensure the IS NRT Chair, and Vice-Chair as appropriate, and the IS RRT Chair, and counterpart as appropriate, or their representatives, are invited to participate, as well as other appropriate agency representatives. The IS NRT Chair/Vice Chair and IS RRT Chair/counterpart should discuss participation of NRT/RRT members on such calls. The IS RRT Chair should notify the relevant state RRT representative(s) of such calls to facilitate internal state coordination.
* If the ESF #15 – External Affairs Annex is activated, interactions with Governors may be coordinated through the support of the intergovernmental affairs component of ESF #15. The lead agency should still ensure appropriate participation by the IS NRT and IS RRT, and the IS RRT Chair should ensure the relevant state RRT representative(s) is notified of calls with Governors, as above.

***(vii) Ensuring OSC is informed of NRT/RRT activities***

* IS RRT Chair should ensure that the OSC or his/her representative is appropriately informed of NRT and RRT activities, and that there is appropriate coordination of NRT/RRT activities with the OSC/UC.

***(viii) Identifying method to share information with non-affected RRTs***

* IS NRT Chair/Vice Chair and IS RRT Chair/counterpart should discuss how to communicate and share information about the response with RRT Co-Chairs that are not directly affected by the incident. Minimally, as noted in paragraph (iv) above, the NRT Executive Director should ensure that the non-affected RRT Co-Chairs are notified of any IS public website established by the NCP/ESF #10 lead agency.

***(ix) Role of NRT***

* On the initial call as appropriate, and on later coordination calls as needs arise, the IS NRT Chair/Vice-Chair and IS RRT Chair/counterpart should discuss the role of the NRT in the specific response. The OSC may be invited to participate. For a SONS, the IS NRT Chair should also be coordinating with the SAO/NIC on support the SAO/NIC may need from the NRT. It is likely that the full role of the NRT may not be identified on the initial call and will continue to evolve over time.
* As issues for NRT involvement are identified, the IS NRT Chair may establish IS NRT workgroups to address them. The IS NRT Chair should discuss the potential establishment of such workgroups with the IS NRT Vice-Chair and IS RRT Chair/counterpart, NRT members, and as appropriate, the SAO/NIC, before implementation.
* The IS NRT Chair/Vice-Chair and IS RRT Chair/counterpart should discuss the potential need for regional representation on NRT workgroups and/or establishment of joint NRT-RRT workgroups. They should also discuss, when applicable, whether there is a request and/or need for state or tribal involvement in an NRT workgroup or other NRT matter, and if so, the appropriate process for that involvement.
* Once established, the IS NRT Chair should ensure an appropriate method is used to keep the IS RRT Chair/counterpart informed of the progress of these workgroups.

Additional NRT-RRT coordination procedures may include, but are not limited to:

* Joint NRT/RRT conference calls if needed on specific topics
* IS NRT Chair, and Vice Chair as appropriate, may also request the IS RRT Chair, and counterpart as appropriate, to participate as needed in briefings to other senior federal officials (agency/department principals or deputies, White House, etc.). (Requests for OSC participation in such briefings, when needed, should be made through: (1) the EPA Regional Incident Coordinator (RIC) for EPA-led responses; or (2) the USCG District Commander for USCG-led responses.)
* Additional coordination procedures specified under inland or coastal Joint Contingency Plans with Canada or Mexico, when those plans are activated.[[7]](#footnote-7)

***Full or partial NRT activation:*** The coordination procedures developed for the incident should also indicate which NRT member agencies will continue to be included in NRT activities for the particular incident after the initial activation (i.e., whether it will continue to be a full activation, or whether it will transition to a partial NRT activation if any NRT members asked to be taken off the IS NRT distribution list).

**C. Interagency Meetings of Higher-Level Federal Officials**

During a SONS or nationally significant hazmat release, interagency meetings of higher-level officials may also be convened (e.g., Principals Committee, Deputies Committee, DRG), in addition to NRT meetings.

If such meetings occur, the lead agency for the response should ensure:

* The IS NRT and IS RRT are informed of these meetings;
* An appropriate flow of information is established up the chain to these higher-level officials; and
* An appropriate flow of information is established down the chain to the IS NRT, IS RRT, OSC, and other appropriate personnel in their agency, of any decisions or key actions taken as a result of these higher level meetings.

Such information-sharing is critical to ensure a coordinated federal response and to avoid duplication of efforts.

**D. Coordination Among Multiple Affected RRTs**

If more than one RRT is activated for the response, the IS RRT Chairs/counterparts should communicate with each other to identify appropriate cross-RRT coordination needs, which may include:

* Holding joint RRT calls
* Sharing meeting summaries of individual RRT calls/meetings
* Inviting representative(s) from one RRT to call in to other RRT’s calls; and
* Establishing one unified cross-boundary IS RRT, chaired by the agency/RRT that provides the OSC for the incident. The details of how such cross-boundary IS RRTs would operate, including member voting, would be documented in agreed-upon procedures among the affected RRTs (which may be reflected in relevant Regional and Area Contingency Plans).

**E. Documentation of IS NRT Activities**

The NRT Executive Director should establish and maintain an IS page on the “private side” of the NRT website for posting NRT meeting announcements, meeting summaries, action items, decisions reached, and work products and other relevant documents.

The Executive Director should manage individual privileges to the website. The following should have preapproved access to the IS NRT page:

* NRT members and alternates
* NRT committee and sub-committee chairpersons
* IS RRT Chair/counterpart and coordinators from affected region
* SAO/NIC, for a SONS; and
* OSC.

Access to the website by others will be determined on a case-by-case basis and may include (but is not limited to): other RRT members from affected regions; RRT members from unaffected regions; additional agency representatives from NRT agencies (particularly up the NRT member chain-of-command); and other federal representatives from the JIC.

***Minimum NRT document identifiers***: All IS documents created by the NRT will:

* Be labeled “For Official Use Only” (unless approved for public release)
* Contain a full list of participants (if documenting a meeting, decision reached, or work product)
* Reference the date and time of occurrence or decision reached; and
* Include a “draft” identifier, with name of author, or an “approved/final” identifier, with name of approving authority, as appropriate for the document.

**Attachment 1**

**Sample Agenda**

**Initial IS NRT Chair/Vice Chair and IS RRT Chair/Counterpart Call**

**NRT/RRT Coordination**

**1. Roll Call and Introduction (NRT Executive Director)**

* Purpose of call: Coordinate NRT-RRT activities for incident
* Trigger for NRT activation for incident *(e.g., request from OSC, RRT, or NRT member; activation due to triggering NCP 300.110(j)(1) criteria)*

**2. NRT/RRT Meetings, Schedules, and Incident Websites**

* Current expectations for holding ongoing IS NRT and RRT meetings

- Ensure no conflict with other key standing IS national/regional/site meetings

* Plans for cross-IS RRT coordination (for incidents affecting multiple RRTs)
* Plans for cross-participation in IS NRT and RRT meetings
* Need for joint IS NRT/RRT calls
* Current expectations for IS NRT and RRT websites and respective access to those websites, and NCP lead agency plans for IS public website
* Plans for sharing IS NRT/RRT meeting summaries (website access and/or emails)
* Plans for keeping non-affected RRTs informed of response activities

**3. Interagency Coordination of Public Communications**

* Lead agency’s plans for interagency coordination of public communications (e.g., national/local JIC, activation of ESF #15)

**4. Coordination of Interactions with Governor(s)**

* Lead agency’s plans for coordinating interactions with affected Governor(s)
* Participation by IS NRT/RRT members

**5. Interagency Meetings of Higher-Level Officials**

* Known IS meetings of higher-level officials (e.g., Principals Committee, Deputies Committee, DRG)
* Information-sharing procedures related to preparing for such meetings and disseminating meeting outcomes, particularly as related to the IS NRT and RRT

**6. NRT Role in Response**

* Minimum IS NRT role: Share information/maintain interagency situational awareness
* Other IS NRT roles?

- Needs from RRT/OSC

- Needs from NRT agencies

- Needs from NCP lead agency senior officials

* ***SONS:*** IS NRT Chair shares known information about SAO/NIC role in specific response, and SAO/NIC coordination with, and requested support from, NRT
* Establishment of IS NRT workgroups
* Potential need for regional and/or state/tribal involvement in any IS NRT workgroups or issues

**7. Keeping OSC Informed of NRT/RRT Activities**

* IS RRT Chair plan for ensuring that OSC/UC is kept informed as appropriate of IS NRT/RRT activities and that NRT/RRT activities are coordinated with OSC/UC as appropriate

**8. Future Coordination Calls**

* Plans for future coordination calls between IS NRT Chair/Vice-Chair and IS RRT Chair/counterpart – standing or as needed

**9. Documentation and Distribution of Agreed-Upon Coordination Procedures**

* Summarize agreements reached on IS NRT/RRT coordination
* Plans for documenting and distributing coordination procedures

1. Federal NRT and RRT agencies serve as primary and supporting agencies under ESF #10. This guidance should be used for national and regional coordination during a SONS or nationally significant hazmat ESF #10 response under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Stafford Act), but should be tailored as appropriate. For example, under a Stafford Act declaration, while RRT activations would still include appropriate state RRT representatives, specific state requests for federal Stafford Act support would be made through the State Coordinating Officer. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For purposes of this guidance, the term “hazmat” is used to refer to hazardous substances, pollutants, and contaminants as defined under the NCP and is not intended to change NCP requirements or interpretations. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For significant radiological incidents, this function would be served by activation of the federal Advisory Team for Environment, Food, and Health for issues within its purview. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Further information on using ESF and RSF support for oil and chemical incidents is provided in the Oil and Chemical Incident Annex, which supplements the Response and Recovery Federal Interagency Operational Plans (FIOPs) that support the NRF and NDRF. The Nuclear/Radiological Incident Annex and Biological Incident Annex also provide for ESF/RSF support for the lead federal agency for nuclear/radiological and biological incidents. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Throughout these procedures, if the impacted area spans more than one RRT, the references in these procedures to the IS RRT mean all IS RRTs in the impacted area. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This is not meant to preclude the SAO/NIC or other senior EPA/USCG official from having individual calls or meetings with Governors. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. For example, the Canada-United States Joint Inland Pollution Contingency Plan (2009) establishes an International Joint Advisory Team (IJAT) that includes representatives from the NRT and a Regional Joint Response Team (RJRT) that includes representatives from the RRT. Section 601.1 of the plan states that the RJRT will provide the IJAT with the Canadian Pollution Incident Reports and U.S. Situation Reports, along with additional comments describing the RJRT’s actions and recommendations. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)