

Joint Inland Pollution Contingency Plan Factsheet

Objectives of the Joint Inland Pollution Contingency Plan

When hazardous accidents or disasters occur along international borders, response actions require rapid coordination between countries. To reduce harm to public health and the environment, countries must establish shared emergency response plans.

The Canada-United States Joint Inland Pollution Contingency Plan or “Inland Plan” is a binational agreement to prepare for and respond to major pollutant releases or spills along the inland border between the U.S. and Canada. The Inland Plan details how the two countries will work together for incidents that may harm the environment or threaten public safety, security, health, welfare, or property. It ensures a coordinated response across all levels of government.

For nearly four decades, Canada and the U.S. have worked to respond to hazardous incidents along the border—protecting people and the environment. The first version of the Inland Plan was signed in 1985. Later updates occurred in 1994, 2009, 2017, and 2022.

Inland Plan Oversight

The implementation and maintenance of the Inland Plan is the joint responsibility of Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). These two agencies rely on the assistance of other federal, provincial, state, territorial, Tribal Nations, regional, municipal, and local levels of government, as necessary.

How the Inland Plan Works

The Inland Plan details an Incident Command Structure and notification procedures between the U.S. and Canada to ensure a rapid response.

The Incident Command Structure puts the Incident Commander in charge, and everyone reports to the Incident Commander. This ensures a clear chain of command in crisis situations.

The incident notification procedure for the Inland Plan spans three levels. Across levels, teams coordinate response actions and track response operations. They also share information with the public, including health and safety updates, and ecological, natural, historical, archaeological and cultural considerations.

Levels of Response Within the Inland Plan

Local

Local On-Scene Coordinators in the U.S. and Scientific Support Coordinators in Canada provide advice, assistance, and support to the Incident Commander or the responsible party during a polluting incident.

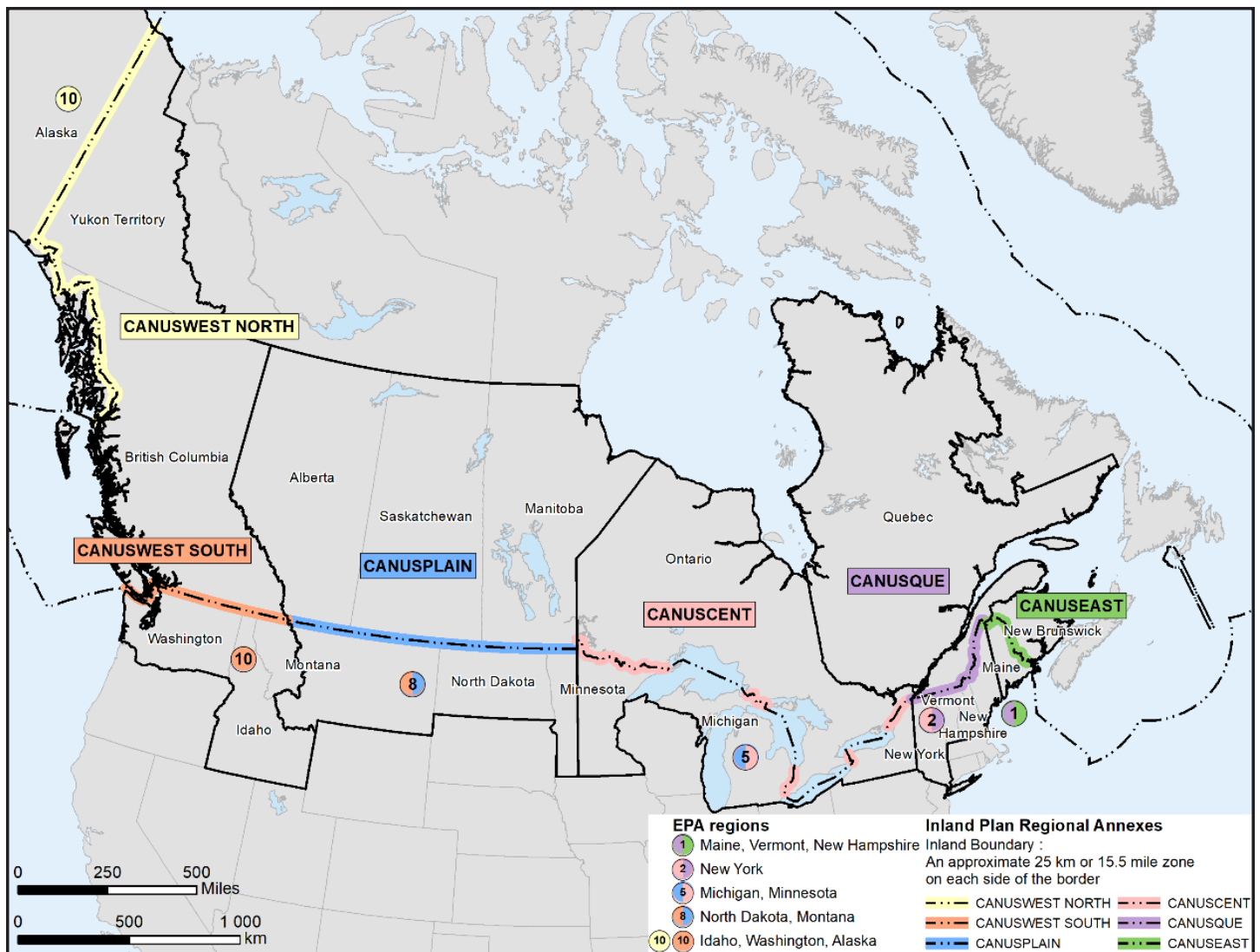
Regional

Local coordinators report the incident to their designated Regional Joint Response Teams, as shown in the map.

National

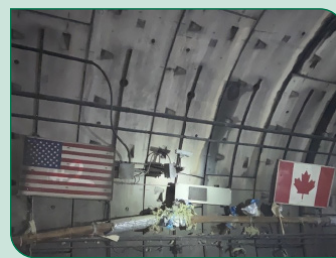
Regional teams notify the International Joint Advisory Team that operates in the headquarters of ECCC and EPA. At the national-level these agencies notify each other through official channels if there is a major polluting incident or threat.

U.S. States and Canadian Provinces Along the Border Comprise Six Regions that Participate in the Inland Plan



The Inland Plan in Action: 2019 Canada-U.S. Sulfuric Acid Trail Derailment

On June 28, 2019, 44 rail cars derailed in the tunnel that runs under the St. Clair River between Sarnia, Ontario and Port Huron, Michigan. The incident released over 12,000 gallons of 98% sulfuric acid in the shared tunnel. EPA formed a Unified Command with Canada and local officials to conduct cleanup operations. Over a nine-day period, the binational team successfully removed the acid, rail car, contaminated debris, and all other wreckage from the tunnel. A later review of the incident identified two key elements of the successful response: 1) extensive use of the Incident Command System detailed in the Inland Plan, and 2) excellent coordination and collaboration among Unified Command agencies.



The U.S.-Canada border tunnel where the incident occurred



Sulfuric acid railcar wreckage after removal from the tunnel

Learn more at www.epa.gov/emergency-response/us-canada-joint-inland-pollution-contingency-plan