LIFE Guidelines for Environmental Emergencies

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Lasting Initiative for *Earth.*

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OBJECTIVE

LIFE Institute Reference Document setting out the guidelines for the classification and handling of environmental emergencies occurring within the scope of LIFE Certification.

APPLICABILITY

This document applies to LIFE-certified organisations/producers that may become involved in any type of environmental emergency, to accredited certification bodies, and to other stakeholders in the LIFE Methodology.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Depending on the nature of its business, a LIFE-certified organisation or producer may be more or less exposed to the risks of environmental emergencies or disasters, which may lead to one or more consequences, such as human, material, economic and environmental losses and impacts. Consequently, in the occurrence of a hazardous environmental event, the LIFE Certification Scheme must safeguard its credibility, as well as the significance associated with the use of its logo.

In this context, guidelines have been established for cases involving hazardous environmental events within the scope of LIFE certification, setting out the definitions and classification of the scale of such events, as well as the actions to be taken by the parties involved. This ensures the transparency of the process for all stakeholders.

Consequently, for any hazardous environmental incident occurring within the scope of the LIFE Certification, which involves the business unit(s) and the area(s) of the certified conservation project(s) and action(s), the procedures set out in this Reference Document must be followed.

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2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To better understand the points to be highlighted in this document, a brief conceptual overview of hazardous environmental events is required; these may be of natural, anthropogenic or socio-environmental origin and may give rise not only to environmental emergencies but also to various consequences in relation to LIFE Certification.

Accordingly, the terminology and definitions established by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR, 2017) have been adopted; the leading United Nations agency for the coordination of disaster risk reduction, which supports governments and stakeholders on the issue of environmental disasters and emergencies.

The UNDRR has been tasked with supporting the implementation, monitoring and review of the Sendai Framework, which works in conjunction with the other agreements of the 2030 Agenda, including the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development, the New Urban Agenda and, ultimately, the Sustainable Development Goals, by coordinating actions within the United Nations system around disaster risk reduction to ensure this happens (UNDRR, 2017).

The "Sendai Framework Terminology on Disaster Risk Reduction" promotes a common understanding and use of the concepts of disaster risk reduction and aims to support disaster risk reduction efforts by authorities, professionals and the public. Below are some of the terms and definitions cited in this reference document, adapted from UNDRR, 2017, by the LIFE Institute.

• **Disaster/emergency:** defined as a serious disruption to the functioning of a community or society on any scale, due to hazardous events interacting with exposure, vulnerability and capacity, leading to one or more of the following consequences: human, material, economic and environmental losses and impacts. The term '**emergency'** is sometimes used as a synonym for 'disaster', for example in the context of biological and technological risks or health emergencies, which, however, may also refer to hazardous events that do not result in serious disruption to the functioning of a community or society.

• **Hazard/Threat:** defined as a physical event, phenomenon or human activity that may cause environmental damage, damage to property, social and economic disruption, or even injury, loss of

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life and other effects on human life and health, and is characterized by its location, intensity or magnitude, frequency and probability.

• **Hazardous event:** The manifestation of a hazard at a specific location over a given period. Serious hazardous events can lead to a disaster or emergency because of the combination of hazard and other risk factors.

Such events, also described in this document as environmental events, may have different origins: **natural, anthropogenic or socio-natural,** which are described below.

2.1 NATURAL EVENTS

They are predominantly associated with natural processes and phenomena, such as geological, hydrometeorological and biological events. Some examples include:

- Forest fires (originated from drought or lightning);
- Earthquakes;
- Vulcanoes;
- Tsunamis;
- Landslides/Mass movements;
- Floods/Flooding/Waterlogging;
- Hurricanes/Ciclones/Typhoon;
- Storms (Heavy rain/Tornadoes/Lightning/Hail/Gales)
- Ciclones;
- Epidemics/Pandemics;
- Pest infestation;
- Drought;
- Extreme temperatures (Heat waves/Cold waves);
- Erosion (Coastal/Marine/Continental/Riverbank).

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2.2 ANTHROPOGENIC EVENTS (ENVIRONMENTAL ACCIDENTS)

They are those induced totally or predominantly by human activities and decisions, such as oil or toxic material spills, dam breaks, industrial explosions, among others, according to publications by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA, 2013).

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, 2013) describes anthropogenic events as unexpected events that cause serious damage to the environment, and which are usually associated with industrial failures, accidents in the transportation of hazardous substances or disasters aggravated by human actions. Some examples include:

- Oil Spills/Toxic Materials/Radioactive or Hazardous Substances;
- Dam breaks;
- Industrial explosions;
- Forest/urban fires.

2.3 SOCIO-NATURAL EVENTS

They are associated with a combination of natural and anthropogenic factors. According to a UNEP publication (2013), degraded ecosystems can exacerbate the impact of natural events, for example by altering physical processes that affect the magnitude, frequency and timing of these events. Some examples include:

- Desertification;
- Environmnetal degradation;
- Climate Change.

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3. EVENT CLASSIFICATION

A hazardous environmental event, whether of natural, anthropogenic or socio-natural origin, may cause social, economic, material and/or environmental damage, depending on its scale and the preventive and mitigating measures taken. Following the occurrence of an event, such damage may have immediate or long-term effects and is generally measured in physical units (for example, square metres or hectares of an area, kilometres of roads, etc.), describing the total or partial destruction of physical assets, the disruption of basic services, and damage to livelihoods in the affected area.

Accordingly, for the purposes of applying the LIFE Methodology, a classification of the **scale of an environmental event** has been established, which may be **small, medium or large**, based on the following categories:

I. Structural Damage;
II. Business Unit(s);
III. Protected Area(s);
IV. Fauna and Flora;
V. Local Communities.

This classification can be seen in **Table 01**.

Table 01. Classification of the scale and categories of the environmental event.

Scale of the Event	Category of the Environmental Event				
	I. Structural damage*	**II. Business unit(s)**	**III. Protected Area(s)**	**IV. Fauna and Flora**	**V. Local Communities****
Small	It does not cause damage to the structure(s) covered by the scope of the certification.	It affects an area comprising less than 20% of the Business Unit(s) covered by the LIFE certification.	It does not affect the certified protected area(s) / biodiversity conservation project(s).	It does not cause the death of any species of fauna or flora in the affected region.	It does not affect local communities.

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Scale of the Event	Category of the Environmental Event				
	I. Structural damage*	**II. Business unit(s)**	**III. Protected Area(s)**	**IV. Fauna and Flora**	**V. Local Communities****
Medium	Causes moderate* damage to the structure(s) within the scope of the Certification, even if this damage is recoverable in the short to medium term.	Affects an area ranging from 20% to 50% of the Business Unit(s) within the scope of the LIFE certification.	Affects up to 40% of the certified protected area(s) / biodiversity conservation project(s).	Causes up to 40% mortality of fauna and flora species in the affected region.	Moderately* affects local communities.
Large	Causes significant damage* to the structure(s) within the scope of the certification, even if this damage is recoverable in the medium to long term.	It affects an area greater than 50% of the business unit(s) within the scope of the LIFE certification.	It affects more than 40% of the certified protected area(s) / biodiversity conservation project(s).	It causes more than 40% mortality of fauna and flora species in the affected region.	Significantly* affects local communities.

Source: LIFE Institute, 2026.

**** I. Structural Damage:***
Moderate Damage: *in these cases, it is possible to repair the structural damage, and some delay in re-occupying the building may be expected. The non-structural systems necessary for the building's operation are functional. Injuries to the building's occupants may be significant in some areas, but moderate in number and severity. The extent of the damage may be significant in some areas, but overall, it is moderate (Federal Emergency Management Agency – FEMA, 2007).*
Significant Damage: *in these cases, it may be difficult to repair structural damage without major building works, and there are delays or it is impossible to reoccupy the building. The structural systems necessary for the building's operation may not be functional. Injuries to occupants may be extensive in number and nature. The extent of the damage is significant (Adapted from FEMA, 2007 by the LIFE Institute).*
***** V. Local communities:***
Moderate Damage: *indirectly affects the community, for example, in terms of access (provided alternatives exist), etc.*
Significant Damage: *directly affects housing, access (provided no alternatives exist), and the communities' productive area/source of income (destruction of fences, crops, grocery stores, etc).*

In the occurrence of any environmental event at the LIFE-certified business unit(s) and/or in the protected area(s)/biodiversity conservation project(s), the organisation/organiser must use the classification in the table above to identify the scale of the incident and follow the subsequent steps set out in this document.

To determine the scale of an environmental event (Small, Medium or Large), the organisation/producer must tick each category only once, in accordance with Table 01. **The scale containing the highest number of ticked categories shall be the scale to be considered for the**

event that has occurred. In cases where the same number of categories is ticked across different size categories, the category of greatest significance shall be considered.

In any situation where an event falling within the scope of the certification receives media coverage, thereby necessitating a public explanation from the organisation, the size classification shall be deemed to be 'Large' for the purposes of processing the LIFE Certification application.

Other methodologies for analysing the size classification and categories of environmental events may be applied by the organisation/producer and will be considered during the verification of this process, serving as a basis for decision-making.

4. EVENT ANNOUNCEMENT

Any environmental event falling within the scope of LIFE Certification must be reported by the organisation/producer to the Certification Body (CB) within five working days of the incident coming to an end, irrespective of the schedule for LIFE Certification audits. Example: a fire at a business unit that lasted 10 days; the 5-working-day period for the organisation/producer to send the notification to the Certification Body begins on the 10th (tenth) day.

Upon receipt of the notification, the Certification Body must inform the LIFE Institute of the incident within 5 working days.

The notification of the environmental event must contain basic information regarding the event and must be submitted by the person responsible for LIFE certification within the certified organisation or producer.

Thirty calendar days after the notification has been sent to the Certification Body, the organisation/producer must also submit a report and/or an opinion containing information on the event that occurred, comprising the same documents as those submitted to the relevant environmental authority, and containing at least:

- location and cause of the environmental event;
- classification of the event's scale, in accordance with Classification Table 01;

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- responsibility for the occurrence of the event (whether it lies with the organisation/producer or with a third party or parties);
- proportion of the area affected;
- routine preventive measures related to the identified cause;
- reason(s) for the ineffectiveness of the preventive measures;
- environmental aspects of the event, whether anthropogenic (environmental accident), natural or socio-natural, and the impacts on biodiversity;
- containment, minimization and mitigation measures;
- action plan for recovery and restoration;
- plan for the prevention of further environmental accidents and/or natural events.

5. TECHNICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE EVENT

Following analysis of the report and/or opinion submitted by the organisation/producer, the Certification Body (CB) shall determine the next steps in the technical assessment, **depending on the classification of the environmental event's scale**:

I. In the case of an environmental event, whether of natural or anthropogenic origin, classified as small or medium-scale, the CB will assess the incident within the timeframe of the LIFE Certification cycle, that is, during its Certification and Follow-up audits.

II. In the case of an environmental event, whether of natural or anthropogenic origin, classified as large-scale, or a medium-scale anthropogenic environmental event for which the organisation/producer is responsible, the CB must carry out an Inspection Visit and a Verification Audit to assess the severity of the damage to the LIFE Certification process, within 60 calendar days of the organisation/producer submitting its report and/or statement.

5.1 INSPECTION VISIT AND VERIFICATION AUDIT

In the applicable cases set out above, the Certification Body shall carry out an Inspection Visit, together with a Verification Audit, at the affected site of the certified organisation/producer; to this

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end, it shall appoint a Committee of experts, taking into account the company's sector of activity; the type of event that occurred; and the scope of the LIFE Certification.

The Verification Audit, as set out in the LIFE Audit Guide, must be carried out for the three modules of the LIFE Methodology, in accordance with the scope of the certification:

I. Management Indicators (LIFE Standard);
II. Biodiversity Pressure Index (BPI);
III. Biodiversity Positive Performance (BPP);

In addition to an assessment of LIFE Biodiversity Credits (LBC), where applicable.

5.2 TECHNICAL REPORT AND AUDIT REPORT

The Commission of Experts must draw up a Technical Report on the event that occurred, containing the main impacts caused by the event.

It is essential that the Technical Report is issued after the Inspection Visit has been completed, and that it contains sufficient information for the Certifying Body to be able to act on the event that occurred, combining the information in the Report with the Verification Audit Report, deciding whether to maintain, suspend or cancel LIFE Certification, as set out in Table 2 below.

5.3 FEES AND EXPENSES

All expenses, including technical fees, related to the Inspection Visit and the Verification Audit for the assessment and investigation of the event that occurred will be the responsibility of the certified organization/producer.

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6. REFERRALS

A copy of the Technical Report and the Verification Audit Report must be sent to the LIFE Institute within five working days of the end of the Inspection Visit and the Verification Audit.

The CB's Opinion regarding the environmental event, whether of natural or anthropogenic origin, when deciding on the maintenance, suspension or cancellation of the LIFE Business and Biodiversity Certification and LIFE Biodiversity Credits, as set out in Table 2, must consider:

I. The scale of the event;

II. The commitment of the Certified Organisation/Producer.

Table 02. A model for decision-making regarding the status of LIFE certification following an environmental event.

				MAINTENANCE	**SUSPENSION**	**CANCELLATION**
I. SCALE OF THE EVENT	Small	X				
	Medium					
	Large					
II. COMMITMENT	**a) PREVENTION**	**YES**	**NO**			
	Procedure(s) containing preventive measures		X			
	Training/Prevention procedures in place		X			
	Existing emergency plan		X			
	Emergency plan implemented		X			X
	b) COMPENSATION	**YES**	**NO**			
	Identified aspects and impacts		X			
	Recovery/Restoration Plan drawn up		X			
	Recovery/Restoration Plan implemented		X			
	Technical quality and adequacy of the Recovery/Restoration Plan		X			

Source: LIFE Institute, 2026.

Regardless of the scale of the event, whether caused by natural or human factors, if the organisation or producer fails to take any preventative and/or remedial action, the LIFE Certification will be automatically cancelled.

In all other cases, it is up to the Certification Body to assess whether to carry out a detailed analysis of the situation, with a view to suspending the certification and granting the organisation or producer a deadline to rectify the situation.

In such cases, it is also up to the Certification Body to decide whether to maintain, suspend or cancel the LIFE certification after the deadline has passed. Where a decision is made to maintain the certification, areas with conservation measures that have been assessed and which may generate credits will be subject to review and an update of the number of credits generated, as these will reflect the quality of the certified area or project following the occurrence of the event.

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NOTES ON THE DEVELOPEMENT OF THIS DOCUMENT

Version 1.0: approved on 22 October 2026 by the LIFE Institute's Board of Directors. Change to the document's classification, which is now a Reference Document (011) rather than a Policy (003). Change to the title of the document from "LIFE Policy on Environmental Accidents" to "LIFE Guidelines for Environmental Emergencies". Update to the scope and terminology of the document, incorporating environmental events of natural origin, in addition to events of anthropogenic origin (environmental accidents), which were already covered in the initial version of the document. Inclusion of new terms, such as 'natural event' and 'anthropogenic event', and their implications. Incorporation of the Theoretical Framework. Revision of Table 01: Classification of the scale and categories of environmental events, and of Table 02: Model for decision-making regarding the status of LIFE certification following an environmental event.

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