

# Media Guide for Public Employees



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## INTRODUCTION

Federal agencies have a responsibility to provide accurate and timely information to the general public and the media.

In many cases, however, agencies do not have a person designated and trained as a Public Affairs Officer (PAO). In such instances, the CEO or a front-line employee must act as the agency's representative to the public.

Many times, the intended message may be lost during the interview; often lack of planning or an inability to relay the message in succinct, easy to understand terms is the cause. Dealing with the media can be a daunting, nerve-wracking experience, whether it is in a face-to-face interview, phone interview or on camera. It is important to be at your best when communicating your message.

This guide has been developed to assist those individuals called upon to speak on behalf of their agency to the press, both managerial and non-managerial employees. Whether you are responding to inquiries, arranging or participating in an interview, or simply providing information for print or broadcast, it is hoped that this media guide will provide you with useful information and some important tips to assist you.

The purpose of this Media Guide is informational in nature for public employees. As in the past, the guidance is based on the principle that the business of Government is vital to serving the public everywhere. No provision of these guidelines may be applied in contravention of contractual agreements; agency instructions or guidelines; Comptroller General Rulings; or other pertinent controlling policies, authorities and instructions governing your organization. Application of this guidance must be consistent with the provisions of applicable collective bargaining agreements or other controlling policies, authorities, and instructions. The purpose of this strategy is to provide **information** when an emergency situation arises. *In all cases, the final decision as to who will interact with the media will be made by the head of each agency and installation in the local area.*

# General Media Information

In order to be effective in getting your message out, you should have a basic knowledge of each medium and how it is organized. Be sensitive to deadlines which will be different for each media type; address each media type in the order of their deadlines to increase the distribution of your message.

**Daily Newspapers:** The newsroom structure is fairly standard. Local news is the responsibility of editors at newspapers. They assign reporters and photographers to cover stories. Each editor covers a specific part of the newspaper, such as a city editor, state editor, fashion editor, or wire editor. At small newspapers, there may only be one editor who carries the title of managing editor. At large newspapers, all editors work for the managing editor. A publisher is in charge of the entire operation. In smaller newspapers, the publisher is often the owner. Reporters will take your information, but generally, if you don't know whom to talk with, see an editor. If your newspaper is in a large metropolitan area, it may have a reporter specifically assigned to cover federal government. In this case, you should ask to speak with the federal beat reporter. If the reporter is not available, ask to speak with his/her editor.

**Weekly Newspapers:** Newspapers published weekly, or bi-weekly, generally work under the same structure as daily newspapers, but with some important differences. Weekly newspapers' deadlines are usually at the beginning of the week: Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday. Since most weekly newspapers are small operations, they tend to run news releases with little or no change. You may find that several weekly newspapers in an area are owned and operated by the same publishing company. Visiting the main office could mean getting your story in all their publications. Studies have found that weekly newspapers are read more thoroughly than dailies.

**Television:** In television newsrooms, the person who assigns news stories to reporters is the assignment editor. The assignment editor coordinates what news stories will be covered during the day. He or she coordinates which reporter and/or photographer will cover a story. The news director is in charge of the station's news operation, and may supervise reporters as well. If you do not have a working relationship with a specific reporter, it is generally best to contact the assignment editor about a story or information. If it is a story for the day of an event, try to call the assignment editor before 9:30 a.m. If you call with information on a story to be done one or more days in advance, call after 9:30 a.m. and before 4 p.m. Before 9:30 a.m., the assignment editor is deciding which stories to cover for the day and making

**THE GATEKEEPERS**

assignments to reporters who begin work at 9 a.m. Usually a TV station has one or two reporters assigned for their 10 p.m. newscasts. They come in around 1:30 p.m. and are usually looking for a new story or a new angle on the 5 and 6 o'clock leads. However, if your story is really important, deadlines are not an issue. They'll cover it.

**Radio:** Large-market radio stations often have assignment editors. In most cases, the person who assigns stories to radio reporters is the news director. Generally, any reporter can take your information over the telephone. But, try not to call a radio station before 9 a.m. The anchor/reporter in the newsroom is especially busy during the mornings - a radio station newsroom's busiest time of day. At many small stations, the reporters also anchor so try not to call these stations at the top or bottom of the hour; they are on the air. Call at 5 minutes before the hour or 5 minutes after.

**Monthly Publications:** Monthly publications are generally magazines or trade journals that cater to a specific audience or deal with specific topical materials. They assign reporters and photographers to cover stories or develop articles much the same as a newspaper. Since articles are usually very thorough, consider this medium when you need to provide detailed coverage. Also, many monthly publications have unusually large distributions, but be cautious about rates. These informational vehicles can be pricey. Save this choice for really important articles and ask to speak with the federal reporter. You may get special pricing for being a government agency. If there isn't a federal reporter, ask who would be the appropriate contact for the subject matter. Also, check deadlines. Most monthlies publish mid-month (to be dated the following month) with deadlines two weeks prior. Deadlines are firm.

**Wire Services:** This medium relies heavily on telephone contacts. Wire services are mostly interested in "hard news" that may have a statewide interest. A wire service telephone clerk or reporter may answer the telephone to take your information or transfer you to a reporter or editor who will take your information.

## GETTING YOUR MESSAGE OUT



### Several common methods get messages to the media:

**Press Releases & Media Alerts:** Press releases and media alerts are designed to notify print and broadcast outlets of an upcoming event (alert), program, or policy change (press release). They are usually one page and inform editors and broadcasters about the "five Ws" of the event: who, what, when, where, why. They should be mailed/faxed in advance of the event to allow the media to plan to attend. Alerts should be used sparingly and only for important or newsworthy happenings. Follow up calls provide an opportunity to tell the reporter what visuals will be available either at the press conference or any visuals you can arrange for them.

News advisories work in partnership with news releases. The advisories alert the media to news conferences and other events and are designed to attract reporters to attend. Once they arrive at your event, the reporters get your news release. Think of a release as a movie—it tells a complete story. Think of an advisory as a movie preview that you see on television or in a theater—it gives the audience enough information to make them want to see the film, but doesn't give away the whole story. A news advisory should generally be limited to a single page. The advisory concludes with a recap of WHO, WHAT, WHEN, and WHERE, quickly summarizing the event. If the event is in a location unfamiliar to the media, give directions. Always list everyone speaking at the news conference (if known).

*Marketing:* Brochures, publications, etc., can be marketed by contacting appropriate persons at media outlets. Share information and obtain specific details on how to incorporate into their format. For TV, it must be visual. Another important aspect of the marketing process is to be quickly responsive to any media requests.

**Public Service Announcements:** Most stations carry Public Service Announcements (PSA's) and are happy to air them, if they receive the audio or videotapes.

**Personal Media Visits:** *Personal visits to media representatives can pay huge dividends.* Public perception of your agency and the federal government as a whole can be improved when you are recognized as a pleasant member of the community. The visits also provide "face to face" connection.

**Wire Services:** Wire services are interested in "hard news" that may have a statewide interest. A wire service telephone clerk or reporter may answer the telephone to either take your information or transfer you to a reporter or editor who will take your information. Later, it will be edited and possibly added to the electronic wire.

**Satellite Distribution:** Satellite transmission is used to provide one-on-one interviews, news conferences or Video News Releases (VNR) to media markets across the United States. The stories or video can be transmitted simultaneously across the nation and can reach millions of people with one program.

## **What Do Reporters Look For?**

Here are some key questions reporters ask themselves in determining newsworthiness:

***Impact and Significance:*** "Will this news affect many of my readers (or viewers or listeners) or only a few? How big of an impact will it have? Will it have lasting significance?"

***Visuals:*** Be sure to include visuals.

***The Unusual:*** "Is this news really something out of the ordinary? Is the program being announced the first of its kind, or is the statistic being released a record high?"

***Controversy and Conflict:***

"Is the news likely to spark debate and disagreement? Does it deal with a hot issue that is already in the news?"

***Human Interest:*** "Does this release include an example of an individual or family dealing with a problem that your agency is working to solve? Will this example touch readers, viewers or listeners emotionally and draw them into the story?"

***Local Angle:*** "Is there anything about the information being announced in this release that has special interest for people in my circulation/viewing/listening area?"

***Overall Interest:*** "Would a story about this announcement be something people would find interesting enough to read, or watch, or listen to?"

## **Do Your Homework**

Have significant developments in my area made my organization more newsworthy?

## **Keep a "Pitch File"**

One way to keep track of the many interesting programs and developments in your area that would make good stories is to create a pitch file, which includes the names, and telephone numbers of key contact persons, important dates, and unusual facts about particular programs and efforts.

## **Select the Right Media**

Once you have a good story idea, identify the media outlets you think would be most interested in writing about the subject. Begin with the most obvious—the major daily, weeklies, and news services in the area—but don't forget about the special market publications.

- ★ Remember: Reporters have an obligation to be fair, and to get both sides of the story.
- ★ Visit the media when you don't have news: build relationships.

# MEDIA EVENTS

## Meetings with Editorial Boards:

In many large newspapers and magazines, an editorial board meets to set editorial policy. Editorial policy dictates the direction a news organization will take on various issues and the slant of its coverage. **In planning for an editorial board, preparation is important!**

### *Pointers for people who will be meeting with the editorial board:*

- \* Arrive at the meeting on time
- \* Have an agenda prepared. Do not go with the intention of just responding to questions. You are there to sell and persuade your point of view.
- \* Prepare press kits in advance

The press kits should contain: biographies, news releases, sample infographics, questions and answers, and photographs (if necessary). Participants should be briefed and prepared for possible questions they may be asked.

The major benefit of an editorial board comes with creating a working relationship with community gatekeepers, having an impact on editorial policy, and fostering a positive image of your agency. Often, in smaller newspapers, a managing editor will meet with you, or a reporter may be assigned to interview you.

Remember, good publicity helps to establish credibility. You should generate good news situations as a track record to offset instances of undesired news. Do not simply wait defensively for bad news.

Rules for establishing a good relationship with news people:

1. Know your organization; really know it.
2. Do the publicity job efficiently, reliably and credibly.
3. Make the reporter's or the editor's job as easy as possible.

## News/Press Conferences:

A news conference is the best method of disseminating news simultaneously to the media. It is a tool that should be rarely used, reserved only for important newsworthy announcements. A great deal of planning goes into hosting a news conference. Reporters will need kits, which contain background material, such as: news releases, questions and answers, photographs (if necessary), biographies, etc. Agency spokespeople should be given talking points, briefed in advance of the event, and go over possible questions that they may be asked. If

conducting a press conference, 10:15 or 10:30 a.m. is best and it will make the noon news. If the material is good, it will carry over into the evening news.

Space requirements will need to be considered also. Be flexible with television cameramen. They will set up lighting and may need to move chairs around.

### *Other tips include:*

1. Carefully schedule the event so it does not conflict with other major news events. Mondays are usually not good.
2. Give proper advance notification
3. Start on time
4. Keep on schedule

## Media Tours:

The media tour can be a valuable method of showing gatekeepers what we do and to increase understanding of our operations. It can give the media an interesting story and allows the stations to get fresh video (B-roll) for their respective libraries to cover future news stories. On-site is the perfect way to demonstrate and make your points clear by directly showing the media a certain situation or environment.

Comprehensive planning is vital to having a successful tour. It will include:

- \* **Welcome and introduction**
- \* **Briefings from agency official(s)**
- \* **Questions and answers sessions**
- \* **Tour of the facility**

The tools needed to conduct a tour are the same as needed for a news conference. Be organized, keep on schedule, and make sure the information shared is timely and useful. Be sure to arrange for hassle-free parking, badges, and clearing photographic equipment ahead of time. A good tip to remember is to make the event easy for the media to cover.

- ☞ What is said about you and your organization in newspapers, television, radio, magazines, and the Internet, will reach more people, and have a greater impact than all other PR elements combined.

# Dos and Don'ts

- ☞ Never send a story to an editor unless it is newsworthy. Be Positive and - Above All - Be Honest
- ☞ Always show your release to at least one program person or to your other sources of information before submitting it for editing. If significant changes are made in editing, your information source needs to see the release again before it goes out.
- ☞ Read your release **carefully** for typos and factual errors before submitting it for editing. Careless and embarrassing errors can make the agency look foolish if they are not caught.
- ☞ **Nothing is more important than accuracy.** If your releases are not accurate, they are worthless. In fact, an inaccurate release can often do more harm than good.
- ☞ Use common sense and good taste in your news stories and in your relationships with news-media representatives
- ☞ Look at what you're getting and think: "Do I really understand this material?" If you don't understand your source material, you won't understand what you are writing – and no one else will. **Never write something you don't understand yourself.**
- ☞ In your initial dealings with the press, arrange a convenient time with the editor to hand-deliver your news release, but after the first meeting, don't waste the editor's time with personal visits.
- ☞ Don't play favorites when distributing news releases. If there are several media outlets in your area, make sure each has the information at the same time.
- ☞ If an editor uses your story, he or she has done so because it contained newsworthy material. There is no need for thanks, unless you know the editor well enough that he or she will not misunderstand your motive. It is, however, a gracious gesture to compliment a reporter on expert handling of a story.
- ☞ Never ask an editor to run a story as a favor to you.
- ☞ If a reporter contacts you for a story, don't provide, or "leak," the same story to other media.
- ☞ Treat the media fairly. If you promised an editor a story by a certain time, have it ready as promised.
- ☞ Don't make off-the-cuff statements to reporters because these will often result with inaccurate information. Giving a reporter wrong information is worse than asking if you can get back with them after obtaining the facts.
- ☞ Never respond to hypothetical questions, asking you to address something that isn't factual, which could result in an erroneous story.
- ☞ If an editor calls you after he or she has your release, provide the answers to his or her questions quickly and completely so he or she can complete the story.
- ☞ Don't ask to see—or hear—the reporter's story before it is printed. Reporters generally reject the notion of showing anyone outside the newsroom their stories before they appear. However, a good reporter will welcome an invitation to check back with you if the information gathered is not as clear as he or she would like it to be.
- ☞ Don't call the editor to complain if your story is not used in its entirety or if it is not used at all. Sometimes space and time limitations or reshuffled feature schedules can cause this. And, as a general rule, news people object to such questions as, "When will this appear?" or "Will you give us a break on this story?" or any similar suggestion that special favors are being solicited.
- ☞ If a serious error appears in your published or broadcasted story, call the appropriate reporter immediately. He or she usually will correct it. Complaining to the reporter's superior seldom produces anything except ill will for the future, without helping the present. Errors emphasize the desirability of being unmistakably clear in the first place.

# BASIC POINTERS

- ☞ Be Open & Cooperative; *Never, Never Lie*
- ☞ Personalize the Organization; *Tell the public who you are and what you do. Public knowledge of your organization is vital to its success.*
- ☞ Treat Reporters & Photographers Courteously and Diplomatically; *Their impression of you becomes their impression of the entire organization and that is reflected in their stories.*
- ☞ Develop Media Contacts; *Always fax news releases and advisories to every news organization in your local area — including the nearest Associated Press bureau. If possible call to confirm the news releases or advisories were received and use this call as an opportunity to reinforce your pitch for attendance at the event or the information you are announcing.*
- ☞ Respond Quickly; *If you would give public information to a customer or client that the reporter is requesting, give it without hesitation to the reporter.*
- ☞ Never Say “No Comment”; *It sounds like you are hiding something.*
- ☞ It is Okay to Say “I Don’t Know” (But I’ll find out) *If you need to do this, gather the facts needed to respond to reporters as quickly as possible with accurate information. Reporters and your story are not well-served if you give an instant response that turns out to be erroneous.*
- ☞ If Your Pulse Races, Pause; *You won’t think well in the fight-or-flee mode. You need a little time to get back to normal-get your thoughts together.*
- ☞ Repeat the Central Idea; *Always go into an interview with one central idea you want to get across - and repeat it often. Your number one priority is to focus on the message of the event. No matter how many times the reporter asks the question, or rephrases it in an attempt to get you to say more, DON’T. Stay on your message!*

- ☞ Nothing is ever off the record. *If you don’t want to see it in print or hear it on the air, don’t say it.*
- ☞ Never use Technical or Agency Jargon or Acronyms; *Use plain everyday language and illustrate with examples when possible.*
- ☞ Be Logical, Factual & Calm; *Don’t ever appear defensive or be critical of third parties.*
- ☞ Using quotable quotes - *The exact wording you choose for the quotes in your release is very important. Reporters can paraphrase everything else in your release, but if they use your quote they must use your language. News writing requires reporters to use at least one quote in all but the shortest of their stories. As a result, they are eager to use a quote that you offer – if it is quotable. Avoid clichés.*
- ☞ Don’t waste time crafting long quotes. *Usually a reporter will use anywhere from one to four sentences of a person’s quote. Two sentences is the most common. Remember, you’re writing a news release – not a speech. Provide information that can be used in the form of “sound bites” –15 seconds –.*
- ☞ Give Yourself Time to Think Before You Talk; *The statements people regret are usually said reflexively, in the traumatic surge of anger or shock that follows a rude surprise or sudden loss. If you can stall for even five minutes, you will do a better job of speaking for yourself or your organization. Do not feel pressured by reporters stressing their deadline, a well-developed message is more important.*
- ☞ Prepare, Prepare, Prepare



# Preparing a News Release/News Story

## Evaluation test for a news release:

1. Is it of interest to at least 10 percent of the publication's readers or to the readers of a particular section to which you would direct it?
2. Is it timely? Past events are history, not news.
3. Does it include the names of people? Better still, does it include names of well-known people?
4. Does it have a local angle?
5. Does it have a human interest angle?

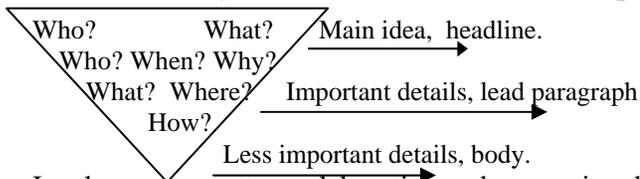
## Basics of a news story: A news story should be all of the following:

1. Factual
2. Timely
3. Interesting
4. Objective
5. State important facts first
6. Have a visual aspect

Good news writing uses:

- the inverted pyramid style, begins with a strong lead and a features quotable quotes, and
- active verbs rather than passive ones. It avoids long and convoluted sentences. It is written in short paragraphs, usually of one, two or three sentences.

Your goal is to produce easily understood releases that look so much like news stories they become the outline for stories reporters produce.



In a longer news story, elaboration and supporting details would go after the lead paragraph and into the body to flesh it out a little more.

## **Conclusion**

The most important thing to remember when writing a news release or an advisory is to produce an accurate, interesting and easily understood account of what your agency is doing. This will get out the message you want in a way most likely to generate news stories.

# Telephone Calls from Reporters

Working with the media is a two-way street. A reporter may contact you in response to a news release or for information regarding an unrelated story. When you do get such a call, find out who is calling and what news organization the individual represents. Find out what the specific questions are and how the information is being used. This will help you frame an answer to best suit the reporter's (and your) purpose. Find out the reporter's deadline. Tell the reporter you will get back to him or her as soon as possible, and do it before the deadline.

Prepare your message. Always have a point of view and a message to sell. Decide after the questioning if you want to go beyond the information that was asked for. There might be an opportunity to make the story more positive from your standpoint. If you do not have the information at hand, tell the reporter you will call back. Find out when the reporter's deadline is and get back to him or her before that time.



# Message Development

Area of Expertise/Topic of interview

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What are the three most important points that you want readers/listeners/viewers to know about your issue? (If you were writing an article about your issue, what three things would you be sure to include?) After you write them, go back and add an example or illustration for each point.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
Example: \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
Example: \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
Example: \_\_\_\_\_

What are the three most often-asked questions about your issue or area of expertise?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

What are three questions you like to get or hope you get from reporters about your issue or area of expertise? Three you know the answers to and make you look good.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

What are or would be the three worst questions reporters could ask you about your issue/area of expertise – three questions you hope you never get, three you're afraid of? Use this to prepare!

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## INTERVIEWS

# INTERVIEWS

## Imprudent or Evasive Answers

Never participate in an interview without a message to promote. The interview is not about answering questions; it is about selling your message. Know well the answers you wish to give—or ask for time to get them. Answering questions you are not equipped to answer only leads to trouble. Don't guess; call back. Conversely, to avoid answering a question that a reporter knows you are capable of answering also leads to trouble. It is damaging to claim ignorance. Never say, "No comment". If you wish to avoid a question, simply say that you believe a response at this time would be inappropriate.

It is as simple as the fact that reporters and their bosses don't like red tape, evasive answers, or standoff treatment. If they get it, what might have been a favorable story may never be written.

Most news people declare that the more unnecessary obstacles are placed in their way, the harder they will work to get their story, for getting it becomes a point of honor. They will almost always manage to print something on it, although such stories are bound to contain a high ratio of inaccuracies if the very persons who are in a position to know the facts deny the actual facts to reporters.

## Radio Interviews

Most radio interviews are done by phone. Sitting at the desk, you can become much too comfortable. It is too easy to get off message. In setting up a telephone interview, arrange to use a speaker phone. In the privacy of your office or the conference room, STAND UP for the radio interview. This will literally keep you "on your toes" and on message. It will also free your hands so that you can gesture. Even over the telephone, gestures make a big difference in your voice delivery and energy. This will help the reporter understand the importance of your key points.

If you go to the studio, do not make assumptions. Often there are several microphones at the desk. Ask where you are to sit. Locate your "cough button" (the button you press to cut off the mike if you feel an overwhelming urge to cough or to clear your throat). Double-check for jangling jewelry, loose papers, clanking buttons, or anything that might rattle against the microphone. In anticipation of call-ins, you may need a headphone set. Since you may be on the air for long periods of time, you will want a glass of room-temperature water. Because of the fear of accidents, studios often do not permit coffee, tea, or food near the equipment.

The profile of a desirable radio guest is much the same as for television. But radio requires much more of your energy. It requires you to titillate the imagination of the listeners; they have no pictures on which to rely. You provide those pictures with your words. As you prepare your notes for a radio appearance, consider speaking with a bit more punch than you would for television. Make your descriptions more vivid.

Radio guests are often expected to interact with listeners who call in, so prepare yourself for a range of logical, strange, and irrational questions. Call-ins can hamper your effort to get your main points across if you have not outlined your points in advance. A long-winded caller who is prepared to debate the hour away can be a

menace to your game plan. If the host is professional, he or she will not allow this to happen. If the host does not intercede, firmly but politely turn the caller into a fan by answering the questions directly and briefly.

Keep a note pad at your side to jot down points to which you must respond. Write down key words that form bridges to the points you have come to present.

Although newcomers tend to be more at ease on radio because they are heard but not seen, do not underestimate the skill it takes to maintain an informative, upbeat, and energetic dialogue. In a way, you have to give more of yourself on radio. You must convince an audience of your value and integrity with your words and the sound of your voice.

Above all else, you have a right to preserve your dignity, to be treated fairly and with respect. Never sit still for a situation that violates your self-esteem. Remember, you are valuable. No promotional opportunity is worth letting someone insult or mistreat you. The fact is, you have a unique gift that you are sharing. If your gifts are not welcomed and honored, they should be withdrawn. If you ever face one of those rare but extremely unpleasant situations in which you are being taken advantage of or mistreated, walk away. There is always life beyond the hot seat.



## Periodical Interviews

You should tape record all interviews. The tape will serve as a record to be shared with your staff and to help you learn and improve. It will also put the interviewer on notice that you will have a record of what is said. Put the recorder in full view of the interviewer and say, "I hope you don't mind that I tape this". For telephone interviews, you must get permission to tape record conversations.

The reporter may bring a tape recorder as a backup for note-taking. This is standard procedure. If the reporter asks whether it is all right to tape the interview, of course you should say yes. Realize, though, that the interview begins when you meet the reporter, not when the tape recorder is turned on or the notebook is at the ready.

You should also be clear in advance whether a photographer is coming or whether the reporter plans to take pictures. If a photographer arrives with the reporter the picture taking will most likely occur first so the photographer can go on to another assignment. If the reporter carries a camera, the photo schedule may be more flexible.

# PROVEN INTERVIEW TIPS

*There are few things in life that strike more fear into people than having a TV camera and microphone shoved in their face. For many, this experience can cause significant anxiety and poor performance. For both the prepared and the unprepared, it can also be a defining moment in their careers. The following suggestions may provide some help for preparation, and may even help with print or radio interviews.*

## PREPARATION:

One of the best ways to succeed in an interview is to *question the reporter*. Why are they interested in your agency? Who else will be interviewed? Do they want to do the interview live in the studio, or can it be taped at the agency? What are some questions they will ask? Who will do the interview and when is it likely to air?

*Consider risks versus advantages of doing the interview.* If the story is important, it is going to air with or without your input. Most of the time, it is better to be part of the story than appear to stonewall or give the impression that your agency is an impersonal, uncaring bureaucracy. However, in those rare instances where you determine nothing positive can result, or if some legality prohibits you from making comments right now, then it is perfectly acceptable to decline.

Once you have decided to do an interview, set some ground rules with the reporter. You can usually determine where the interview will take place: select a location where you will feel most comfortable. Set a time limit. The longer the interview, the more likely you will say something you wish you hadn't.

*Make sure you are prepared.* Do your homework. Whoever is conducting the interview will most likely know the subject inside and out. Above all...**PRACTICE**. Make your point up front, and then explain and give examples. What is likely to survive in this

fast-paced medium (and actually air) is your initial key message. Keep the key message short and take every opportunity to drive it home. Should you be asked about a negative issue, acknowledge the problem without repeating the reporter's words, then bridge to your own positive point. *Stay away from hypothetical questions.* Use that opportunity to bridge to one of your important points.

## APPEARANCE:

Since TV is a visual medium, it is important to look your best. Many people believe how you look on camera is actually more important than what you say. *Conservative clothing is a must.* Don't distract the audience from your message by wearing a loud tie or flashy jewelry. If the interview is outside, be sure to remove sunglasses. If the interview is indoors or in the studio, do not wear tinted glasses. The viewers must be able to see your eyes. If you have the time, rehearse in the clothing you plan to wear and make a videotape. This can be very helpful in making corrections to clothes, posture, and jewelry. It will also help you relax and feel more comfortable when the "real" interview occurs.

### Apparel tips for men and women:

- \* For Caucasian-like skin tones, blues and reds (burgundy, crimson) work best; also consider purple, charcoal, and turquoise. Avoid brown, orange, green, and yellow. Men should wear neckties of blue or red. Avoid patterns, unless they are small, conservative patterns.
- \* For dark skin tones and people with deep color, avoid light colors (i.e. white, yellow, bright pink, light green). Under television lights, these colors will cause darker skin to appear much darker than it is. Instead, consider wearing: olive, gold, tan, and medium grade blues or grays.

*Men should ideally wear a suit, a solid colored long sleeve shirt (pastels work best), with a silk necktie, small conservative patterns are acceptable.* Jackets should be buttoned for stand-up interviews and for sit-down interviews to maintain a professional appearance. *Women should wear a conservative-length dress suit.* Avoid overly bright colors and patterns. Both men and women should have well-groomed hairstyles; clean, trimmed fingernails; remember to empty your pockets—no bulges or

tinkling coins; no gum, candy or cigarettes; and avoid any visible body piercing. Accept any offer for light studio makeup (even if the women are already wearing makeup, a little extra is helpful under studio lights). However, most TV stations won't do makeup anymore, so if you feel you need some, bring your own along. Remove nametags, lapel pins, and extraneous items from your pockets and lapels (except agency monograms).

If the interview takes place at your facility, pick a location, which is visually appealing, germane to the issue if possible, and without background activity, which could distract the audience from your message.

### **TELEVISION STUDIOS:**

There is nothing you really need to know about studio microphones, since the studio staff will do all the work for you. The only thing you need to remember is anytime you are near a microphone, even when the cameras are off, your mike may be on. *Do not say anything you may regret!* Usually the audio engineer will run test for voice levels before the interview. If he says, "can we get a level," he simply wants to hear your speaking voice at the level and pitch you plan to use during the interview. He doesn't care what you say, so use this time to rehearse your main message. Introduce yourself; give your title, agency, etc. ***Speak in a normal tone of voice and maintain that level at interview time.***

You will probably get a chance to visit with your interviewer at this time. Practice concentrating on conversing with him/her and forgetting about the camera so when the time comes, you can be relaxed and be yourself.

### **IT'S SHOW TIME:**

Well, the time has arrived to see if all of your preparation will pay off.

**When the interview begins, remember to concentrate on the interviewer and his questions - *Not The Camera!*** Relax and smile when, and if, appropriate. Sometimes the topic of your message may be of a serious nature and smiling is not appropriate. Gesture naturally. Keep your head up. Lean slightly toward the interviewer (if seated) and keep away from the chair back. Stand up straight (if standing). Look interested and alert.

***Remember to start with your lead message and closely follow with other main points.*** This way, if your interview is "cut" for airing, you will have said what was most important at the onset. Keep your hands at your sides if standing, or in a relaxed position on your lap if sitting except for occasional gestures. Do not make nervous gestures like playing with your jewelry, your watch, jacket, tie, etc. Do not swivel in a swivel chair, except to initially make eye contact with the interviewer. Then maintain that position except when gesturing. If you are on a panel it is appropriate to glance toward other panel members as they speak. If there are distractions in the studio or the reporter does not maintain focus on you, continue with your point anyway and don't stop or you'll look foolish if you react to this distractive behavior.

A common technique reporters use is to pause after you respond to a question in hopes you may say more than you intended. ***Do not "feed the mic."*** It is the reporter's job to keep the interview going, so ***when you have finished your answer - STOP.*** Also, be sure to keep your hands off of the microphone and do not lean toward a freestanding mic every time you speak.

When the interview is over, the reporter may ask you to stay in place while the cameraman shoots a "*reverse angle,*" which will be spliced into the interview later. The reporter will likely keep the conversation going; so do not let your guard down. ***Remember, you are still "on record" and the tape is still rolling.***

It is quite common for emergency responders and others in unique career fields to visit among themselves to ‘catch up on old times’ during time spent waiting at the scene of an emergency. A camera can and HAS caught individuals laughing and telling stories at the scene of an emergency; *be acutely aware that viewers will not understand.*

One final thought: *A reporter will often ask at the end of an interview if you have anything else you would like to add.* Take that opportunity to reinforce your primary message, or make a point you were not able to make during the interview. Ending on a high note will help boost your confidence and may raise your comfort level for the next time a TV “opportunity” comes your way.

Before leaving the set, be sure to thank the interviewer, the cameraman, and the sound engineer. DO NOT ask for a tape or an early viewing.

## Appearances on Hosted Shows

What if:	Option 1:	Option 2:
You get a miserable cold that hits moments before you are due at the station. Gagging and coughing, you can hardly speak.	Call the host and decline to appear. Offer a substitute who is prepared to speak on the same topic, someone who can do a good job. Offer to reschedule at their convenience.	Call the host. Explain your problem. Let the host handle getting a new person.
The talk-show host alters the topic at the last moment.	Convince the host to reverse the decision, or if you are prepared to discuss it, forge ahead. Use specific points to tunnel your way back to your own topic whenever appropriate.	If the suggested topic is ludicrous and you will feel like an idiot discussing it, leave! Say you are not prepared for the change. While you would love to participate, you don’t want to embarrass anyone. You wish to reschedule.
The host mispronounces your name badly as you are introduced.	Correct the person immediately. Be polite. Perhaps you can find a way to use it to make a point.	Wait until the commercial break and tell the host how to pronounce it.

<b>What if:</b>	<b>Option 1:</b>	<b>Option 2:</b>
The host talks too much. You can't get a word in edgewise.	Politely but firmly step on his or her lines. Unless it will result in the eruption of World War III, break into the conversation.	Wait until the commercial break. Remind the person that you have a few points you need to get across.
You are on the air with a panel. You cannot get a word in.	Go for it. Seize your time. Do it with dignity, but do it.	At the break, ask the moderator to clarify ground rules. Explain that not much is being accomplished with the free-for-all.
Your time is running out and you have not yet said what you came to say because the moderator hasn't asked the right question.	Ask and answer your own question. "People most often want to know" or "I am so often asked" or "You haven't asked the most-often-asked question yet."	Interject, "One fact the audience might find interesting is..."
You are on, but your time is reduced by the talkativeness of a flamboyant guest on the air before you.	Get to the heart of your material. Pick the most important point and stick to it.	After the show, ask to be rescheduled.
You have uncontrollable sneezing on the air.	Take your leave. Apologize and return later, if possible. The host will cover for you.	

<b>What if:</b>	<b>Option 1:</b>	<b>Option 2:</b>
The host alters the topic midway through an on-the-air interview.	Tread water. Gently turn the conversation back to your topic.	Be direct. Say "You've changed the topic and I am unprepared. I don't want to give misinformation."
You have a hostile call-in while on the radio.	Try to reason with the person, but only for an instant. "I don't think this discussion is going to resolve anything" is a good exit line. Do not offer your services or try to heal this person of anger or dementia on the air.	Let the host handle it.
You are asked a question you are unable to answer.	Say "I don't know the answer to that one."	Say "That's a good question and I'll have to look up the latest information. A related question that I've just researched is ..."
The moderator suddenly runs out of time. You are not going to be on the show after all. You have waited in the green room. Friends and family are viewing and listening.	Show disappointment, but turn major effort toward rescheduling. Be polite.	

# EMERGENCIES AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

## EMERGENCIES AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Emergencies make bad news. Any bad news may have a disastrous impact on how the public perceives your agency. Crises come in many shapes and forms: accidents, earthquakes, fires, floods, murders, protest demonstrations, robberies, strikes, suicides, and others too numerous to mention. Chances are, nobody is going to insist that you outline a crisis public-relations plan before any emergency occurs. However, any one of the emergencies listed is also a public relations emergency.

This is so important that it could well be your first step in devising your own PR plan for dealing with emergencies. You or whomever you appoint to serve as your contact with the news media should get to know the media right now—before any crisis erupts.

The event phase of an emergency is often characterized by uncertainty, rapid rate of change, and intense media interest. Usually, disseminated information and facts are incomplete. It is important to recognize that information coming to you from the media, your own organization, and other organizations may not be accurate. Simplicity, credibility, verifiability and speed count when communicating during this phase.

### **Try to put a positive slant on the news:**

Try, where appropriate, to focus the attention of reporters on the diligent efforts of management or employees to cope with the emergency, for example, rescue or care of the injured and reduced damages.

You might give the names of the employees who helped by:

1. Alerting employees to the danger
2. Leading employees to safety
3. Rescuing or caring for the injured

4. Reducing damage or loss of life in any other way.

Questions the media might ask concerning explosions, fires, or natural disasters are slightly different. For example:

1. What caused the explosion or fire? This question should be referred to the fire department spokesperson.
2. How much damage was done? Avoid any dollar estimate, even a “ball park figure.” If you’re wrong, you’ll regret seeing this number in print or hearing it on the news. The extent of damage may be indicated only in a general way.

Suicides, bombings, and irrational actions of people may happen on rare occasions. Should any of these take place at your property, after you have tended to people injured or in need, contact your legal counsel to prepare statements for release to the press.

### **Dealing with Group Disturbances**

Problems of this type might include picketing or aggressive activity. Bad news such as this can be aggravated when the group sponsoring the activity informs the media ahead of time of its intentions. This means reporters, television cameras, and photographers may be on the scene before you’re even aware of what is happening.

Once you learn of the situation, you should prepare a media statement. It should be approved by legal counsel, if possible, and should be brief, factual, and as objective as possible.

If the group disturbance is well organized and members have contacted the media in advance, you can be certain that they have prepared their own written information for release to the media. You are justified in asking for a copy of this material—either from the media or the group itself. This will help you in preparing your own statement. If you cannot obtain this information in written form or orally, it is reasonable for you to respond to media questions by saying you cannot comment on something about which you know nothing.

## Handling the Emergency

1. You should always have a single spokesperson for the press in these emergency situations. Direct all other employees to refrain from commenting publicly in a crisis. EXPRESS EMPATHY AND CARING IN YOUR FIRST STATEMENT.
2. Maintain close contact with individual members of the media. They might be able to tell you things you do not already know. This also prevents the flow of false information.
3. Log all facts released, including the times. This will avoid duplication and conflicting reports should new developments change facts.
4. There's seldom a reason why you should not be quoted by name.
5. Never argue with a reporter about the value of a story.
6. Any information given to one source should be given to all. Do not play favorites; equal access to information is imperative. With that said, you should provide for the local media first. Do not discard them in favor of the national media and the well-known names. You will continue to need local media support even when the event has ceased to be of national attention or when future events do not draw national attention.
7. Never refuse to reveal information without an explanation.
8. Always know to whom you are talking.
9. Never falsify, color or slant your answers. A reporter can see it coming and nothing sets the journalist off faster than this.
10. Be sure there is the least possible delay between the time you get information and when you give it to the media.
11. Have safety, labor, and employee records available for your reference.
12. If damage must be estimated for the press, confine your statement to a general description of what was destroyed.
13. Always accentuate the positive if you possibly can. As facts become known, clear them and give them to the news media.
14. DO NOT release the names of victims until you know for certain that the families involved have been notified. Tell reporters the name(s) of victim(s) will not be released pending notification of next of kin. Then follow up to see that they get these names as soon as possible.
15. Don't repeat negative or inflammatory words used by a reporter. It could end up as part of your quote.
16. Don't demonstrate a great deal of emotion during interviews, which might convey panic, particularly on TV. It is preferable to do TV interviews off camera. However, if taped, remember that you are being taped. All of your remarks, gestures, and facial expressions will forever be captured on video. So collect your wits about you, and stay calm and focused.
17. Don't attempt to blame anyone for anything.
18. Set a time for updates.

## Questions often asked:

1. What happened? When? Where? Why?
  - Known # of injured or killed? (current)
  - Total # affected?
  - Extent of property damage?
  - What was the cause?
2. Is there danger now?
3. Names of dead and injured, following notification of relatives. ***Never release this information prior to notification of families.***
  - Their resident city, age, how long with the agency, and their position.
4. What do you have to say to the victims or victims' families?
5. What effect will it have on the community, production or employment?
6. How much will it cost the organization?
7. When will we find out more?

## Depending on the nature of the emergency, possible topics include:

1. What has been done to prevent recurrence of this type of emergency?
2. What are the plans for reconstruction?
3. What has been done to express gratitude to the community for its help?
4. What has been done to help employees?
5. Who is responsible, when appropriate, for recognizing employees for their help in saving lives, deterring the spread of fire, etc.?
6. Make sure to recognize other agencies that have assisted during the emergency.

Poor or sloppy handling of any emergency can seriously affect how the public perceives your agency. We have advised you to get the news out fast. But don't jump the gun. It's a good idea to withhold comment until all the facts are in. Remember to stay focused, and don't lose your cool. The calmer and more educated your response, the greater likelihood your message will be "on-point" and heard by the reporter and the audience.

If the media is "at your door" and you need time to assemble the facts for the initial press release statement, consider using the following pre-scripted responses. Getting the facts is a priority. It is important that your organization not give in to pressure to confirm or release information before you have confirmation from your scientists, emergency operations center, etc. The following are responses which give you the necessary time to collect the facts:

### IF ON PHONE TO MEDIA:

- "We've just learned about the situation and are trying to get more complete information now. How can I reach you when I have more information?"
- "All our efforts are directed at bringing the situation under control, so I'm not going to speculate about the cause of the incident. How can I reach you when I have more information?"
- "I'm not the authority on this subject. Let me have (name) call you right back"
- "We're preparing a statement on that now. Can I fax it to you in about two hours?"
- "You may check our web site for agency/company background information and I will fax/email you with the time of our next update."

### IF IN PERSON AT INCIDENT SITE OR IN FRONT OF PRESS MEETING:

- "This is an evolving emergency and I know that, just like we do, you want as much information as possible right now.

While we work to get your questions answered as quickly as possible, I want to tell you what we can confirm right now:

- At approximately (time), a (brief description of what happened).
- At this point, we do not know the number of (persons ill, persons exposed, injuries, deaths, etc.)
- We have a (system, plan, procedure, operation) in place for just such an emergency and we are being assisted by (Police, FBI, Emergency Coordinating Office) as part of that plan.
- The situation is (under)(not under) control and we are working with (local, State, Federal) authorities to (contain this situation, determine how this happened, determine what actions may be needed by individuals and the community to prevent this from happening again)
- We will continue to gather information and release it to you as soon as possible. I will be back to you within (amount of time, 2 hours or less) to give you an update. As soon as we have more confirmed information, it will be provided.
- We ask for your patience as we respond to this emergency.

One final piece of advice: During an emergency, if you do not manage your own news event, someone else is sure to mismanage it for you.

The best reaction to criticism is to consider it. It may be valuable. If you are tempted to get into battle with the media, remember, they always fire the last shot. Continue working with them in the spirit of a free press.

## **GLOSSARY**

# GLOSSARY

**Actuality:** A radio news interview usually tape-recorded.

**Assignment Director/Editor:** The assignment director coordinates what news stories will be covered during the day. He/she coordinates which reporter and/or photographer will cover a story. Assignment directors are most commonly found in television and radio news departments.

**AP:** Associated Press.

**Beat:** An area or specialized topic assigned to a reporter such as the Federal beat or the City Hall beat.

**B-Roll:** The video you see while a television reporter tells the story.

**Background:** This term varies in definition based upon media:

- Music or sound effects used at a low level behind presentation, or
- Information provided that is not used for specific quotations.

**Board:** The piece of equipment operated by a radio announcer. It controls the microphones, volume, tape decks, cart machines, CD's (compact discs), etc.

**b/w:** Black and white (advertisement).

**Cart:** A tape cartridge used in radio control rooms for playing commercials, public service announcements, news actualities, station identification, etc. It has a continuous loop or tape, which automatically cues itself to the beginning.

**Circulation:** Indicates the number of regular subscribers.

**Contact:** The person listed on a news release as originator of information and source for news or PSA for further information.

**Controlled:** Free circulation decided by publisher (not a paid subscription).

**Cue:** Signal to begin or stop for people, music, or video. An engineer or producer will nod or point at you, or you may be told to wait for the "on air" light to go on.

**Deadline:** Last possible moment that a news story or advertisement can be accepted.

**Director:** Person who directs the performer, studio technicians, and production workers for a particular show (usually television); may also select material and performers, plan sets, and determine the sequence and angles of camera shots.

**Editor:** The editor is usually the newspaper counterpart of the assignment director. An editor in electronic broadcasting electronically edits videotape in the news department.

**Embargoed:** The term utilized to indicate the information you provide in a news release should not be used until a specified time (date and time should be included).

**Floor Manager:** TV production staff member who remains in the studio to relay cues from the control room to performers and technical staff.

**Format:** General style of music/ on-music broadcast by station).

**Frequency:** (Print media) monthly, weekly, daily, etc.

**Glossy:** (1) Photograph with a shiny finish. (2) Quality of paper used for newsletters, infographics, or art.

## ***GLOSSARY -continued-***

**Level:** The volume of your voice. A radio interviewer or television floor crew-person will ask you to say a few words so they can "set the level" or "check the level" of your microphone. By doing so, they will be able to properly position the microphone and volume control for your voice.

**Localize:** To emphasize the local angle of a story.

**News Director:** This person is the manager of the news department. He or she usually has the authority to hire/fire and dictates the news format.

**Producer:** Person who plans and supervises production of a show or series of shows or spots.

**PSA:** This is an acronym for Public Service Announcement. It is basically a commercial presented by a non-profit, tax exempt organization. Stations do not charge a fee to play PSA's.

**SAU:** Standard Advertising Unit (equals 2 1/8 inches wide, 1 inch deep).

**Simulcast:** Same content broadcast on two stations.

**SOT:** Sound On Tape or "Sound bite"

**TMC:** Total Market Coverage (newspapers distributed to all homes free).

**Voice-over:** The voice of a television narrator who does not appear on camera.

**Wire:** News services, such as the AP (Associated Press), provide customers with written copy for news, features, weather, etc. The "wire" services provide copy for electronic media, such as radio and television and for print media.

## **TEMPLATES AND OTHER USEFUL EXAMPLES**

## PRE-SCRIPTED EMERGENCY MEDIA RESPONSES

### IF ON PHONE TO MEDIA:

- “We’ve just learned about the situation and are trying to get more complete information now. How can I reach you when I have more information?”
- “All our efforts are directed at bringing the situation under control, so I’m not going to speculate about the cause of the incident. How can I reach you when I have more information?”
- “I’m not the authority on this subject. Let me have (name) call you right back”
- “We’re preparing a statement on that now. Can I fax it to you in about two hours?”
- “You may check our web site for agency/company background information and I will fax/email you with the time of our next update.”

### IF IN PERSON AT INCIDENT SITE OR IN FRONT OF PRESS MEETING:

- “This is an evolving emergency and I know that, just like we do, you want as much information as possible right now. While we work to get your questions answered as quickly as possible, I want to tell you what we can confirm right now:
  - At approximately (time), a (brief description of what happened).
  - At this point, we do not know the number of (persons ill, persons exposed, injuries, deaths, etc.)
  - We have a (system, plan, procedure, operation) in place for just such an emergency and we are being assisted by (Police, FBI, Emergency Coordinating Office) as part of that plan.
  - The situation is (under)(not under) control and we are working with (local, State, Federal) authorities to (contain this situation, determine how this happened, determine what actions may be needed by individuals and the community to prevent this from happening again)
  - We will continue to gather information and release it to you as soon as possible. I will be back to you within (amount of time, 2 hours or less) to give you an update. As soon as we have more confirmed information, it will be provided.
  - We ask for your patience as we respond to this emergency.

## EMERGENCY CRISIS RISK COMMUNICATION +

### **Build Trust and Credibility by Expressing:**

- + Empathy and caring
- + Competence and expertise
- + Honesty and openness
- + Commitment and dedication

### **Top Tips**

- + Don’t over reassure.
- + Acknowledge uncertainty.
- + Express wishes (“I wish I had answers”).
- + Explain the process in place to find answers.
- + Acknowledge people’s fear.
- + Give people things to do.
- + Ask more of people (share risk).

### **As a Spokesman**

- + Know your organization’s policies.
- + Stay within the scope of responsibilities.
- + Tell the truth. Be transparent.
- + Embody your agency’s identity.

**BE FIRST. BE RIGHT. BE CREDIBLE.**

### **Prepare to Answer These Questions:**

- + Are my family and I safe?
- + What can I do to protect myself and my family?
- + Who is in charge here?
- + What can we expect?
- + Why did this happen?
- + Were you forewarned?
- + Why wasn’t this prevented?
- + What else can go wrong?
- + When did you begin working on this?
- + What does this information mean?

### **Stay on Message**

- + “What’s important is to remember...”
- + “I can’t answer that question, but I can tell you...”
- + “Before I forget, I want to tell your viewers...”
- + “Let me put that in perspective...”

**CONSISTENT MESSAGES ARE VITAL**



## Message Development for Emergency Communication

### First Consider the Following:

➤ Relationship to event	➤ Give facts/update Rally to action	➤ Print media release Web release
➤ Demographics (age, language, education, culture)	➤ Clarify event status	➤ Through spokesperson (TV or in-person appearance)
➤ Level of outrage (based on risk principles)	➤ Address rumors	➤ Radio
	➤ Satisfy media requests	

### Basic Emergency Message Components:

1. Expression of empathy: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Clarifying facts/Call for Action:

• Who _____
• What _____
• Where _____
• When _____
• Why _____
• How _____

3. What we don't know:

4. Process to get answers:

5. Statement of commitment:

6. Referrals:

For more information \_\_\_\_\_

Next scheduled update \_\_\_\_\_

### Finally, check your message for the following:

Positive action steps	Avoid jargon
Honest/open tone	Avoid judgmental phrases
Applied risk communication principles	Avoid humor
Test for clarity	Avoid extreme speculation
Use simple words, short sentences	

Taken from the Crisis and Emergency Risk Communications developed by CDC

## Incident Media Call Triage Sheet

Deadline: \_\_2 hrs \_\_Today am \_\_Today pm \_\_ASAP \_\_Other

Media outlet:

Local \_\_TV \_\_Daily/Wire \_\_Radio \_\_Magazine \_\_Other

Regional

National

Caller's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Caller's contact info:	Phone(s): _____
	Fax: _____
	Email: _____

<b>Request:</b>	<b>Topic:</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> SME questions	<input type="checkbox"/> Numbers _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Interview (name request) _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Response/Investigation _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Background/B-roll _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Health/disease issue _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Fact check	<input type="checkbox"/> Hot issue 1 _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Update	<input type="checkbox"/> Hot issue 2 _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Return call to press officer	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____

Action needed:

Comments:

Return call expected from press officer

Return call expected from SME

PA\*\*suggested triage priority:

Level A  Level B  Level C

No action needed; call closed by:

PA answered question  PA referred to Internet

PA referred to CIO  PA referred to outside agency

PA other \_\_\_\_\_

Taken by: \_\_\_\_\_ \*SME=subject matter expert

Time: a.m. \_\_\_\_\_ p.m. \_\_\_\_\_ \*\*PA=press assistant

Date: S M T W T F S \_\_\_\_\_

Taken from the Crisis and Emergency Risk Communications developed by CDC

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