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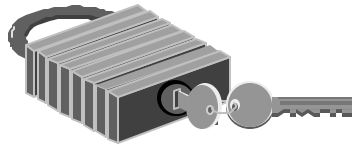
Communicating with the
Public & the Media

Communicating with the Media

The primary goal of this section of the Communication course is to provide you with information that will assist you in communicating with the media. This will include verbal, written, and on-camera tips for communication of risk & technical material.

When you have completed this section, you will:

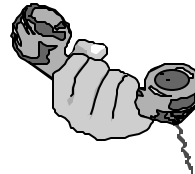
- 1) Know some basic rules of media communication.
- 2) Understand how to write a media release.
- 3) Prepare for interviews.



Who's Authorized to Talk to Reporters?

Receiving a phone call from a reporter is likely to cause your heart to race and your hands to sweat. The fear of saying something inappropriate -- even when you don't know anything --- causes panic. Prepare for a such a call by treating every caller as if it were a reporter.

NOTE: Know your department's policy on who is authorized to talk to reporters and inform reporters. Transfer the caller if you can.



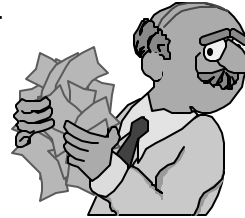


It Can Be Easier!

The media can be an asset to public health agencies and a challenge. Learning to work with reporters and the media in non-outbreak situations often improves relations during critical situations. The rules below apply in all situations.

Some basic rules for working with the media are:

- Be Timely and communicate often.
- Don't exaggerate or minimize the level of risk.
- Acknowledge uncertainties and limitations.
- State what continues to be done.



Know What Your Goal Is

The rules of general communication must be abided by when you are working with the media. Your message must be the same for each person you speak with For any of these people may also be communicating with the media (*and you want your message to be the same from all sources*).

When you set your message, make sure you can answer the 5 W's .

- ◆ WHO is at risk.
- ◆ WHAT the risk is to.
- ◆ WHEN the exposure occurred.
- ◆ WHERE the exposure occurred.
- ◆ WHY there is a risk.

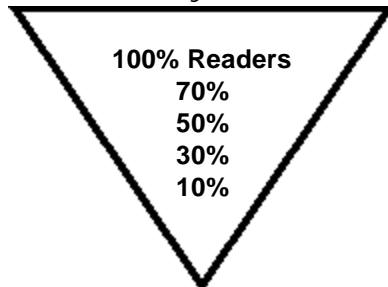


Techniques For News Releases

People don't like to read mysteries or technical papers when reading the newspaper --- or a letter on information that is important to their health. They just want the facts! If you are assisting in writing a media release, keep these facts in mind:



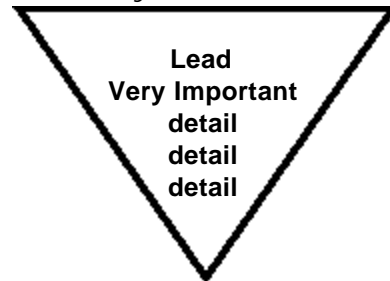
How 'they' Read it



Paragraph

2
3
4
5

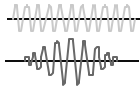
How you Write it



Avoid jargon and keep your sentences short.

Try to write your message at the 6th to 8th grade level.

(with the assistance of the 'grammar' option on your word processor)



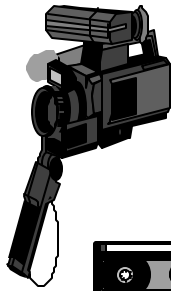
Talking to Reporters by Phone

If you are the spokesperson:

- ☞ Find out what the reporter already knows before you begin to answer their questions. *It saves time and helps you assess the story's 'angle.'*
- ☞ Take a few moments to regain your composure.
- ☞ Be Confident - Not defensive -- when you talk.
- ☞ Take Charge of the conversation, but be professional.
- ☞ Remember the primary goal - Give your message.
- ☞ Speak S L O W L Y and don't use jargon !



Talking to Reporters on Camera



On-camera interviews seem the hardest for people. Follow the guidelines given earlier for talking with the media on the phone and for creating written statements.

Prepare a written statement to hand to the reporter. Study your statement. Memorize your goal. And, practice with your peers.

- Chat with the reporter before going on camera.
- Be sincere and consistent.
- Avoid standard phrases.

Nothing Is Ever 'Off-the-Record' !



When To Communicate Further

When a situation is ongoing, it is extremely important you initiate additional communication with the media. If you do not, they will go elsewhere for their story and it may not be as accurate as it should be. Stay in control of the situation; call the media with updates and fax or email the update so no mis-statements of facts can occur.

- ✦ Monitor the events.
- ✦ Assess the public's response.
- ✦ Evaluate the measures taken.
- ✦ Check with your community network.



When all else fails.....

Seek Advice!

There will be times when the agenda is different than your goal and the media is not helping you. When this appears to be happening, call a meeting with the PR experts in your agency to establish a plan. Make sure all staff -- including receptionists, know the plan.



Contact other agencies you work with and notify them of your plan as well. Remain calm and focused on your message and don't get caught up in the other things being said.