

# Working with the Media

Modules for MPH Core Classes



THE SOUTHERN CENTER FOR

**Communication, Health & Poverty**

*A note to course instructors:*

The material included in these modules will help your students learn specific communication skills related to working with the media. The materials were developed in response to needs expressed by UGA MPH students during focus group meetings. Students in several MPH tracks indicated a need for more practical training in communication skills, including interviewing, media relations, report writing, team building, and community interaction. These same skills feature prominently in the Public Health Foundation Council on Linkages Between Academia and Public Health Practice document, “Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals.”<sup>1</sup>

Much of the information contained in this manual was inspired and adopted from a manual entitled, *Introduction to Media Relations* (1992) by Bob Howard, Office of Public Affairs, and Carol Robinson, Office of the Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, sponsored by the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials and the Public Health Foundation, in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/Public Health Training Network. For more information on how to obtain the video version of this particular resource go to: [http://bookstore.phf.org/product\\_info.php?products\\_id=39](http://bookstore.phf.org/product_info.php?products_id=39)

The modules are designed so that instructors can drop them into a course curriculum at virtually any point. The modules are self-contained, and therefore instructors need little disciplinary knowledge or experience in media relations to facilitate the instruction. Each module contains background reading and instructions for all the suggested exercises and activities. Each module is designed to take approximately 2.5 hours of class time to complete.

**Specific modules included in this packet include:**

- ✓ How to write a press release (2.5 hours)
- ✓ How to assemble a press kit (2.5 hours)
- ✓ How to be interviewed by the media (2.5 hours)

All class exercises and activities will appear in an enclosed box like this.

There will also be information on **resources** and **helpful tips** throughout the modules.

# **Preliminary activity: Creating a context for working with the media**

## **Introduction**

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Numerous proposals for public health workforce development have advocated public and organizational communication skills for all practitioners. “Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals” promulgated by the Council on Linkages between Academic and Public Health Practice offers specific recommendations for training in communication. The competencies adopted by the Council in 2001 were divided into eight domains- Domain number 3 is Communication Skills (Table 1). All six of the competencies listed are relevant to practicing media relations.

### **Table 1- Recommended core competency communication skills for public health professionals**

1. Communicates effectively both in writing and orally, or in other ways
2. Solicits input from individuals and organizations
3. Advocates for public health programs and resources
4. Leads and participates in groups to address specific issues
5. Uses the media, advance technologies, and community networks to communicate information
6. Effectively presents accurate demographic, statistical, programmatic, and scientific information for professional and lay audiences

Source: *Council on Linkages Between Academia and Public Health Practice* (<http://www.phf.org/competencies.htm>)

### **Understanding the difference between science and news media**

Journalists are a vital link between the scientific world and the public; however, news reporters and scientists have divergent approaches and goals. Brooke Gladstone (Interview on “Morning Edition” with Robert Lee Hotz [transcript]. National Public Radio. June 4, 1998) provides a summary of the conflict between science and journalism, “Science is about questions and journalism is about answers; science is for the ages while journalism is for the moment. Table 2 provides a general overview of such differences.

**Resource:** D.E. Nelson, R.C. Brownson, P.L Remington, & C. Parvanta (Eds.), *Communicating public health information effectively: A guide for practitioners* (pp., 73-96), Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.

**Table 2- Contrast between mass media and public health goals**

<b>Mass Media Goals</b>	<b>Public Health Goals</b>
Entertain, inform, or persuade	Educate
Make a profit	Improve health of the public
Reflect society	Change society
Address personal concerns	Address societal concerns
Focus on short term events	Focus on long term outcomes
Present two or more points of view	Discount or dismiss unsubstantiated claims
Deliver salient pieces of information	Create understanding of complex information
Provide definitive (certain) answers	Acknowledge uncertainty and realize that conclusions can change

Source: Greenwell, M. (2002). Communicating public health information to the news media. In D.E. Nelson, R.C. Brownson, P.L Remington, & C. Parvanta (Eds.), *Communicating public health information effectively: A guide for practitioners* (pp., 73-96), Washington, DC: American Public Health Association

## **Background reading for Activity 1**

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### **The importance of building relations between the public health workforce and the media**

In response to public health threats and hence, increasing public interest in health issues, newspapers are publishing feature articles and special health sections, and many television stations have added programming on health-related topics. Accessing health information is one of the most common reasons why people use “new media” such as blogs and Internet discussion lists. As future public health leaders, your students will have the opportunity to take advantage of this intensified interest to inform the public about vital public health issues, tell their side of a story, and deliver news about health and risk issues to their communities.

This guide offers basic techniques that will help your students effectively deliver health messages through the media. It also offers suggestions on ways your students can build cooperative partnerships with media organizations to help ensure a flow of accurate public health information to the public.

In order to maintain relations, there are several important things a public health practitioner should do when working with the media. Provided is a basic list of suggestions.

### **Cultivate relationships with local journalists and news directors**

Building and maintaining relationships with reporters is essential to getting your messages out in the media. The time to establish a relationship with the media is long before any trouble strikes. Try and establish and maintain credibility in good and bad times. Serving as a trustworthy source of information enhances your reputation, as well as your organization’s reputation. Make sure to return reporters’ telephone calls or emails and work directly with them to help them get the facts straight,

the message clear. By doing this your organization's perspective is more likely to be accurately communicated to the public.

**Understand a reporter's job responsibilities.**

- Reporters are responsible for disseminating information quickly, accurately, and objectively.
- Reporters are interested in finding a good story. They want news.
- Reporters usually work on tight deadlines. Return their calls and let them know whether you will agree to be interviewed.

**Maintain a list of media contacts**

Being able to contact the right people is essential especially in an emergency or crisis situation.

**Ensure you have trained spokespeople**

Answering a reporter's questions effectively can be a challenging task. An effective spokesperson will be able to simplify content, provide a diplomatic statement to an event or to something someone has said, anticipate tricky questions, and have lucid and concise statements ready.

**Have a one-page media policy for your organization & ensure all are aware of it**

According to Leo Brown (2004)<sup>2</sup> a media policy provides guidelines for the release of information and establishes responsibilities of public information officers and other personnel when dealing with the media.

**Know your facts when you speak to the media**

Always research and rehearse what you are going to say to the media. One way to prepare for an interview is to anticipate what your audience already knows about a given situation, what are the three points the audience is most likely to get wrong unless they are emphasized and then develop your answers accordingly.

**Know & respect media deadlines- Follow through when asked for information**

Make sure you help reporters meet their deadlines. The length of time a health story can remain of interest for media coverage follows a similar pattern regardless of the medium covering it. A health story that revolves around a single event generally lasts about 24 hours in newspapers, radio, and television. However, a story which contains a connected set of events, such as a toxic waste site discovery, investigation, and cleanup, can be newsworthy topic for months.

**Provide thanks for interviews / coverage**

Always be sure to extend professional courtesy to your contacts. Professional, courteous behavior helps build relationships.

**Always be honest**

In the event of a health emergency or crisis, it is vital that you have maintained a reputation as a dependable and available information source with representatives of many different media outlets serving your community. Always be honest when dealing with the media. Providing false or inaccurate information can damage your reputation and may also put the public's welfare in

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<sup>2</sup> Brown, L. (2004). *Media Relations for Public Safety Professionals*. Jones and Bartlett Publishers.

jeopardy. If by chance you do not know the answer to a question you can always tell the reporter you will get back to them with the answer or refer them to someone who might know.

### **Activity 1 – Create a Scenario**

Ask students to outline scenarios in which they--as public health professionals-- will need to inform the public of an event in the community. The scenarios might deal with health and safety during a natural disaster, an environmental clean-up program in the community, or conducting a health screening fair. Remind students to consider the full range of agencies and organizations with which public health professionals are employed. While a governmental public health agency comes to mind most readily, remind them of the communication functions of other entities such as hospitals, industry, and private sector consulting groups.

While students in a health promotion track probably won't have any difficulty envisioning themselves in such a scenario, other students aiming for careers as laboratorians might find it challenging to see how their work can have a public face; nonetheless, it is important for these students to understand all the possible roles for themselves in a chain of public information.

After students sketch the outlines of such a health-related event, ask them to share with the class actual media coverage of a similar event if they can.

**Helpful tip:** The Lexis/Nexis Academic Universe contains archives of over 5,000 news periodicals. Students could go there to get ideas. Also, the Georgia Department of Health offers news releases on their website. Both sites will help students come up with ideas for this exercise.

If they wish, students can use Activity 1 as the basis for all the activities in the following three modules.

Students can work independently or in groups for this activity.

# **Module 1: How to write a press release**

## **Creating Media Opportunities: Purpose, audience and message considerations**

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Few topics stir public interests more so than health. The media often capitalizes on the public's interest in health by providing stories of new hope or no hope. Nonetheless, public health can work with journalists in an effort to set the agenda for what people think and talk about. By participating in the media process, you can exert more control over the messages that are delivered. One way to reach the public via mass media is through a press release. When you have a story to tell, it is important to consider purpose, audience, message, message delivery, and timing. It is also important that you know how to pitch the story to a media outlet.

**Helpful tip:** Be sure to choose the appropriate medium in order to tell the story most effectively. Do not neglect to consider smaller local, faith-based, and/or ethnic media outlets, including AM radio stations, church bulletins and community papers distributed free of charge. Often non-traditional media outlets are eager for news copy, and they can reach a great many people.

**Resource:** Community Tool Box (CTB) is a website that provides practical information to support community health and development work. The contents of this site were developed and are maintained by the Work Group on Health Promotion and Community Development at the University of Kansas in collaboration with AHEC/Community Partners in Amherst, Massachusetts. For more information go to <http://ctb.ku.edu>. The following module on press releases was adopted largely from materials on the CTB website.

**Resource:** The National Association for County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) offers an excellent web resource titled, "Media Outreach Guide." For more information go to: [http://www.naccho.org/advocacy/MarketingPublicHealth\\_guide\\_introduction.cfm](http://www.naccho.org/advocacy/MarketingPublicHealth_guide_introduction.cfm)

### **Pitching a news story**

The National Association for County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) offers the following suggestions when pitching a local news story.

**“First, do your homework:**

- Find out which newspaper section covers stories like yours and identify the editor(s) for that section.
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- Find out how much lead time the newspaper needs to run a story and schedule your meeting before that deadline.
- Research the newspaper’s online site or library to determine if it has published stories on the current topic. Editors will appreciate that you know what the paper already has reported on these issues.
- Before the meeting, sit down with a colleague and rehearse your pitch. Include any community partners who will join you in the meeting.

**Once you’re in the door ...**

Keep your message simple and concise. Try to keep your introduction to three or four sentences that will tell the editor why he should be interested in publishing your story. Give more details as the conversation continues, but think of your opening as a way to heighten interest.

After you’ve made your initial introduction, be prepared to answer more specific questions. Is there a local hook? An upcoming related event? Have a list of community groups who can provide background and interviews for reporters to help localize the issue. The more resources you can offer, the better your chances of success.

**Aim at the right person.**

Do a little homework— which reporter actually covers your issue? Who has written positive pieces in the past? Whether you are pitching an innovative program or stressing an important public health issue to the local TV news, it never hurts to call the assignment editor or the news desk: they will tell you who is appropriate.

**Get to the point.**

A pitch that clearly frames the story idea in the first or second sentence is infinitely more welcome than one that tiptoes up to it, or worse, buries it under paragraphs of phrase-making. In almost every case, reporters know instantly whether an idea will work for them.

**Remember: It’s a pitch, not a monologue.**

Give them enough information up front to pique their interest, but let them interject with questions before too long, certainly within the first 30 seconds.

**Give them time.**

The smartest pitchers tell reporters about things that are happening months before the news peg actually comes up. This allows reporters and sources to work together to figure out when and how a piece would work for a newspaper.

**Be a resource.**

The easier you make it for the reporters, the better the chances they'll bite. Be ready to immediately provide quotes, background and interview opportunities. One strategy is to send a **pitch note or announcement** to your local media offering yourself as an expert on the issue at hand. The reporter/pitcher relationship is really pretty simple: You want the reporter to cover your story; in exchange, you help make the reporter's job easier."

Source: [http://www.naccho.org/advocacy/MarketingPublicHealth\\_guide\\_pitching\\_stories.cfm](http://www.naccho.org/advocacy/MarketingPublicHealth_guide_pitching_stories.cfm)

### **Writing a press Release**

The press release, also known as a news release, is the tool most frequently used to communicate with the news media. However, they should not be issued without a very good reason for doing so. Some general rules of thumb include:

- Issue releases on ALL new programs, no matter the size.
- A press release should be short, no more than two pages.
- In the lead of first paragraph, use the five W's and the H: Who, What, Where, When, Why and How. For example...

As the start of the 2008-2009 school year quickly approaches, the Georgia Division of Public Health encourages parents to make sure their children get the required vaccines needed for school registration.

Who – The Division of Public Health

What – Certain vaccines are required for school enrollment

When – Effective for the 2007-2008 school year

Where – The State of Georgia

Why – The state recently implemented additional vaccine requirements for all children attending child care, Pre-K and private and public school facilities.

How - Remind parents to schedule immunization appointments for their children

Community Tool Box offers the following suggestions that can make press releases potentially newsworthy.

“1. *Human interest* -- People want to read about other people and what they do and say. This is an element that relates to our natural curiosity. Stories with this ingredient are sure to capture attention. Focus on a particular person's story or on a human angle.

2. *Emotion* -- If what you're reporting has an impact on your readers' lives, you can be sure it's news. It doesn't have to happen locally to affect you. Stories about environmental welfare are as important as stories about your local city dump's sanitary conditions.

3. *Proximity* -- Usually, people are more interested in what happens close to them. Local stories are most likely to grab attention. However, with the globalization of the world, people are also becoming more and more interested in what happens in distant places.

4. *Timeliness* -- Generally speaking, the fresher the news, the better. People want to know what is going on right now. Of course, there are timeless stories that can be written at any time; these are most likely to be feature stories, which need to be “pitched” differently than press releases.

5. *Prominence* -- Famous people, places and institutions always have a place in the news. If you throw a party, your friends will know. If a famous actor throws a party, it'll be in every magazine.”

A standard press release is 300-800 words long. The ideal headline of a press release is 80-150 characters long. Usually contact information for a news source is provided directly below the headline. Providing a release date for the news is also standard practice.

Press releases should be sent to all media, including television and radio. In addition to the major papers in your area, send releases to small and specialty papers, such as ethnic, religious, and community newspapers that reach the community you serve. Smaller specialty papers may be tremendously respected in certain communities. Below you will find several examples of press releases put out by the Georgia Department of Human Resources.

## Examples of press releases <sup>3</sup>

### **Fatherhood 101: Athens**

By Camille Cunningham, 404/463-5027  
[cycunningham@dhr.state.ga.us](mailto:cycunningham@dhr.state.ga.us)

*February 15, 2007*

ATLANTA (GA) – Athens residents are invited to participate in a Fatherhood Summit on March 13, 2007 at the Athens Technical College from 10:00 a.m. until noon, where they can learn about the services offered by the Office of Child Support Services (OCSS) and the Department of Technical Adult Education (DTAE). This event will provide an overview of the Georgia Fatherhood Program and a review of the new Child Support guidelines that went into affect on January 1, 2007. The Fatherhood Program provides low-income parents with counseling and training at state technical colleges in order to increase their wages. The Athens summit, the fourth of six to be held statewide, will include employers, community leaders, faith based organizations, and state and local political leaders.

“Parenting is not an easy task, however it can be especially difficult for those who face financial barriers,” says OCSS Deputy Director, Keith Horton. “We are pleased we are able to prepare these individuals with the skills necessary to break down those barriers”.

Since 2001, the Fatherhood Program has served 15,000 non-custodial parents, assisted 2,700 participants in receiving a GED, 750 participants in receiving a vocational certificate, and 9,300 participants in obtaining employment. The Fatherhood Program generally takes three to six months to complete and serves both fathers and mothers who are non-custodial parents. The participants are required to work at least 20 hours per week while enrolled in the program and pay child support. Upon completion of the program, participants receive assistance in obtaining full-time employment at a livable wage.

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<sup>3</sup> The first three press releases in this section can be found at the Georgia Department of Human Resources- Division of Public Health- Online News Archives at <http://dhr.georgia.gov> The fourth release can be found at: <http://scdhec.net/administration/news/2007/nr20070209-01.htm>

## **Food Stamps Program – First line of defense against hunger**

By Beverly Jones, 404-218-6056

[bjjones2@dhr.state.ga.us](mailto:bjjones2@dhr.state.ga.us)

*September 10, 2007*

ATLANTA (GA) – Although Georgia has seen mostly increases in its Food Stamp Participation Rate over the last few years, officials at the Division of Family and Children Services are continuing to look for ways to let more qualified Georgians know that they are eligible for the federally funded program.

"The Food Stamp Program is the first line of defense against hunger for poor families," said Mary Dean Harvey, director of the Division of Family and Children Services, the state office which oversees the program. "Most needy people are aware of the program, but many do not know they are eligible and we are engaging in a multifaceted outreach approach to inform them, particularly the elderly and the Latino community," she said.

The elderly and Hispanics have the lowest participation rate of 7 percent and 4 percent, respectively. DFCS officials say the lack of participation among the elderly is typically pride and the "stigma" often associated with welfare. For Latinos it tends to be language barriers and simply lack of knowledge about eligibility. To that end, the Division has established partnerships with the Latin American Association, faith-based organizations, local health departments, and businesses that cater to the Latino population. The state's outreach to the elderly, include collaborations with a network of senior centers through the Aging Services Agency as well as partnerships with local churches. The state is also in the early planning stages of Georgia GOLD, (Georgia's On-line Delivery) project to improve general accessibility to the Food Stamp Program. The project is being designed specifically to provide information and online application for the non-participating eligible Georgians. The state expects to launch the project next year. Currently more than 947,000 people receive food stamps per month in the state. About 52 percent of the food stamp benefits go toward children and 41 percent toward adults.

Persons interested in applying for food stamps should call their local Department of Family and Children Services.

## Number one killer in Georgia: Cardiovascular disease

By Lisa Moery, 404-463-2299  
[lsmoery@dhr.state.ga.us](mailto:lsmoery@dhr.state.ga.us)

August 21, 2007

ATLANTA (GA) – Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the leading cause of death in Georgia, accounting for one-third of deaths in the state. The Georgia Department of Human Resources (DHR) wants you to know about ways you can lessen the affects of this disease. CVD includes all diseases of the heart and blood vessels including heart disease caused by reduced blood supply to the heart; stroke; congestive heart failure, a condition in which the heart can't pump enough blood to the body's other organs; hypertension or high blood pressure; and atherosclerosis or hardening and narrowing of the arteries. DHR has several initiatives that address CVD, including the Cardiovascular Health Initiative (CVHI), which is part of a national effort funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CVD), to address heart disease and stroke prevention. CVHI in collaboration with other prevention programs works to increase awareness about the importance of being physically active, not using tobacco, eating healthy, and having regular checks-ups in lessening one's risk for CVD and other chronic diseases.

"In 2004, more than 22,000 Georgians died from cardiovascular disease, and Georgia's CVD death rate was 14 percent higher than the national rate," said Stuart Brown, M.D., director of the Division of Public Health. "Incorporating healthy lifestyle behaviors and knowing the signs and symptoms of heart disease and stroke can save your life," said Brown.

DHR's Stroke and Heart Attack Prevention Program (SHAPP) is an awareness, detection, treatment and control program that targets low-income, uninsured or underinsured patients with uncontrolled high blood pressure. Funded in part by the Georgia General Assembly, the SHAPP program aims to reduce illness and death from cardiovascular disease associated with high blood pressure. There are 137 SHAPP clinics around the state, and they are partnerships between public and private health care providers. Both drugs aimed at reducing high blood pressure and guidance around lifestyle changes are made available in clinics to eligible patients. Once a patient's blood pressure is under control they are generally seen on a quarterly basis.

Seek medical attention immediately if you are experiencing any of the following signs of heart attack: chest discomfort; general discomfort in areas of the upper body including in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach; shortness of breath; cold sweat; nausea; or lightheadedness.

You also should seek help if you have symptoms of stroke, including: sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body; sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding; sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes; sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination; or sudden, severe headache with no known cause.

Reduce your risk for cardiovascular and other chronic diseases by following the steps of the Live Healthy Georgia campaign: *Eat Healthy, Be Active, Be Smoke Free, Get Checked and Be Positive*. Following these guidelines can greatly reduce the chances of developing cardiovascular disease and other chronic diseases, leading to an improved quality of life and reduced healthcare costs. For more information, visit: [www.livehealthygeorgia.org](http://www.livehealthygeorgia.org).

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Feb. 9, 2007

**Graniteville health screenings start Feb. 15**

AIKEN – The Aiken County Health Department and Aiken Regional Medical Center will begin a second round of health screenings Feb. 15 for Graniteville residents affected by the Jan. 6, 2005 chlorine spill, the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control announced today.

“A representative from Aiken Regional Medical Center will call those who have signed up with either the registry at USC-Aiken or Aiken 211 to schedule appointments for the screening,” said Marge Heim, regional systems administrator with DHEC’s Region 5 in Aiken. “Those individuals within a half-mile of the derailment and spill will be first to be scheduled for an appointment. Others will be scheduled as we extend the area of those who may have been exposed.”

For questions about the health screening, call Marge Heim at 642-1608 or Ann Lancaster at 643-4034, at DHEC’s Aiken County Health Department.

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**For more information:**

Thom Berry – (803) 898-3885

E-mail – berrytw@dhec.sc.gov

**Resource:** The website for *Emergency Risk Communication for Public Health Professionals* has many excellent checklists and worksheets that can help with message planning. The particular checklist in Activity 2 was adapted from a checklist found at:  
<http://www.nwcphp.org.riskcomm/resources/NewsRelease.pdf>

### **Activity 2- Critique a press release**

Have students critique the above three examples using the following criteria.

- Is the lead direct and to the point? Does it contain the most important and interesting aspects of the story?
- Have the who, what, where, when, why and how been answered in the first few paragraphs?
- Are the sentences short and concise? Paragraphs short? Words common and concrete?
- Has editorial comment been placed in quotation marks and attributed to the appropriate person?
- Are the quotations natural- that is, do they sound as though they could have been spoken?
- Are spelling and punctuation correct?

### **Activity 3 – Write a press release**

There is a basic template to use when writing a press release. The following activity will give students practice in writing a press release.

Ask students to write their own press release on any topic of interest using the template provided on the following page.

Then have your students critique each others press releases. Potential things they could look for is whether or not they made their stories newsworthy and whether they supplied the details that journalists would be looking for in each story.

## **Template for Press Release**

“The purpose of this initial press statement is to answer the basic questions: who, what, where, when. This statement should also provide whatever guidance is possible at this point, express the association and administration’s concern, and detail how further information will be disseminated. If possible, the statement should give phone numbers or contacts for more information or assistance. Please remember that this template is meant only to provide you with guidance.” One template will not work for every situation so only use the parts that are applicable.

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: (name of contact)

PHONE: (number of contact)

Date of release: (date)

**Headline—Insert your primary message to the public**

Dateline (your location)—Two-three sentences describing current situation

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Insert quote from an official spokesperson demonstrating leadership and concern for victims.

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Insert actions being taken.

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List actions that will be taken.

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List information on possible reactions of public and ways citizens can help.

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Insert quote from an official spokesperson providing reassurance.

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List contact information, ways to get more information, and other resources.

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*Source: Emergency Risk Communication CDCynergy, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2003. Resource:* For a more comprehensive list of questions geared towards ensuring your news release is accurate, clear, and correctly formatted see the checklist provided by the, “Emergency Risk Communication for Public Health Professionals” course. This course was created by the Northwest Center for Public Health Practice and can be accessed at:  
<http://www.nwcp.org/riskcomm>

## **News Release Checklist**

- Is the lead direct and to the point? Does it contain the most important and interesting aspects of the story?
- Have the who, what, where, when, why and how been answered in the first few paragraphs?
- Are the sentences short and concise? Paragraphs short? Words common and concrete?
- Has editorial comment been placed in quotation marks and attributed to the appropriate person?
- Are the quotations natural—that is, do they sound as though they could have been spoken?
- Has the newspaper style (AP or UPI) been followed faithfully throughout the release? If in doubt, contact your state health department public information officer to check your copy.
- Are spelling and punctuation correct (including names, titles, and organizations)?
- Have all statements of fact been double -checked for accuracy?
- Has the release been typed, double-spaced? Is the font a sans serif (e.g., Arial, Helvetica)? [Note: Serif fonts (e.g., Times, Times New Roman) sometimes are not clear when faxed.]
- Is the release in a prominent place (such as top right-hand corner above the release #)? Is the release time indicated?
- Are the names and phone numbers for further information included?
- Are pages numbered and titled in journalism format?
- Is the release properly identified as “Embargoed” or “For Immediate Release”?
- Is it labeled with a consecutively assigned number and logged in a notebook that tracks all releases?

Source: *Emergency Risk Communication for Public Health Professionals*. This checklist can be accessed online at: [www.nwcphp.org/riskcomm/resources/NewsRelease.pdf](http://www.nwcphp.org/riskcomm/resources/NewsRelease.pdf)

# **Module 2: How to assemble a press kit**

The following section was adapted from two resources. The first is, “The Guide to Working with the Media” published by The Corporation for National and Service Learning. This resource can be accessed at: [http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/Media\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/Media_Guide.pdf). In addition, material for this module was adapted from the “Emergency Risk Communication for Public Health Practitioners” developed by the Northwest Center for Public Health Practice. This document can be accessed at: <http://www.nwcphp.org/riskcomm> Example materials were provided by South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control.

## **What is a press kit?**


Providing a reporter with the right information should be your first step in introducing your program, event or research finding to the newsroom. Providing the media with a press kit keeps you from having to cold-call reporters, and also allows them to have your contact and other information handy.

Typically press kits include a:

1. One-page background information on your organization
2. One-page background information on the topic at hand
3. Previously published news clippings that mention your organization (be sure they are positive) and on the topic at hand
4. Your contact information

Module exemplar: The January 6, 2005 train accident that resulted in a chlorine gas leak in Graniteville, South Carolina.

*Example 1: One page background information on the organization managing this story (Source: DHEC, SC)*



The header of the fact sheet features the DHEC logo on the left, which consists of three panels: a caduceus, a tree, and a map of South Carolina. Below the logo are the words "PROMOTE PROTECT PROSPER". To the right of the logo, the words "D H E C" are spaced out above the large, bold text "Fact Sheet". Below this, a black banner contains the text: "SC Department of Health and Environmental Control • 2600 Bull Street • www.scdhec.net • Promoting and protecting the health of the public and the environment."

## **S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control**

The S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control was formed in 1973 from the merger of the State Board of Health and the Pollution Control Authority.

DHEC is a centralized public health agency in that it operates the 46 county health departments around the state. This is done through a system of eight regional offices for both public health and environmental protection programs.

The agency's mission is to promote and protect the health of the public and the environment. Our vision is for healthy people living in healthy communities.

Some of our services are available to all South Carolinians while others have eligibility requirements. Many are free, while others carry a small charge to help cover expenses. DHEC is also the state's official vital records keepers for such documents as birth and death certificates.

Along with the agency's environmental programs, DHEC operates the state's coastal zone management program through field offices located along the coast.

DHEC is not a cabinet agency with a director appointed by the governor. The S.C. Board of Health and Environmental Control oversees the agency's operations and appoints a commissioner who manages the day-to-day functions of the agency. The seven board members are chosen by the governor to represent the state's congressional districts with the advice and consent of the State Senate.

The agency has approximately 4,300 full time employees, most of whom work in the health department clinics around the state.

In the future you may also be asked to create a document detailing the topic at hand. Provided is an example of a summary statement from the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control.

***Example 2: One page background information on topic (Source: Thom Berry, DHEC, SC)***

**Summary:**

**Public Health and Environmental Emergency Response to the Graniteville Train Wreck**

**January 31, 2005**

At 2:39 AM on Thursday, January 6, 2005, a 42 car Norfolk Southern train wrecked in Graniteville. The rupture of a tanker car resulted in the release of approximately 60 tons of chlorine vapors in the vicinity of the Avondale textile mill complex, the commercial district and residential areas in Graniteville.

The immediate priority for the Graniteville-Vaucluse-Warrenville Fire Departments and Aiken County Sheriff's Office was the protection of human life. Emergency responders in protective clothing assisted in evacuating individuals from the immediate area of the release. Nearby residents were instructed through emergency alert messages and news media reports to shelter in place: remain indoors, close windows and doors, and turn off heat and air conditioning units.

First notification to DHEC came at 3:50 a.m. Fifteen minutes later, the first local response from DHEC's Edisto Savannah Environmental Quality Control district, began. By 4:30 a.m., staff from DHEC's Bureau of Land and Waste Management's Emergency Response Team and the Commissioner's Office Division of Media Relations were en route. A full response team arrived at 7:40 a.m.

DHEC was heavily involved in the environmental emergency response, coordination of health and medical services, public information and risk communication activities.

Environmental response activities included entry into the "hot zone" to evaluate the characteristics of the release and its hazards, to conduct plume modeling and evacuation planning, to assess environmental impacts, and to monitor conditions in the area. Air sampling continued throughout the event. DHEC staff monitored and supervised the clean up of the crash site.

This mass casualty event required decontamination, triage and treatment of large numbers of people coordinating emergency medical services, hospital care and disaster mortuary services.

Decontamination sites were set up at USC Aiken at approximately 6:55 AM, and at Midland Valley High School. DHEC personnel assisted EMS personnel with medical evaluation at the decontamination sites.

Shelters began opening during the morning at USC Aiken, Midland Valley High School, South Aiken High School, First Baptist Church, and the May's Community Center in Augusta. DHEC provided nursing staff for Midland Valley, South Aiken and a Special Medical Needs Shelter.

Governor Mark Sanford declared a State of Emergency at Noon Jan. 6.

The emergency response to this event was coordinated through a unified command of authorities. An incident command post was established in West Aiken. At one point, more than 100 government agencies and other organizations were involved in the response.

A mandatory evacuation of the one-mile zone was ordered by local authorities. House-to-house checks in the vicinity were undertaken to implement the evacuation. Over 5,400 people were evacuated from a one-mile radius of the wreck site. A curfew from 6:00 p.m. until 7:00 a.m. was imposed for residents living within two miles of the crash site.

Norfolk Southern Railroad opened a family assistance center and provided money for food and shelter to residents who were forced to evacuate.

There were nine deaths including six workers from Avondale Mills, the train engineer, a truck driver and a local resident in his home. Autopsies performed the next day found all nine died from chlorine inhalation.

DHEC has begun epidemiological studies and a registry created for follow up of long-term health and psychosocial consequences. At least 324 people were evaluated at local hospitals in Aiken, Columbia, West Columbia, Barnwell, and in four hospitals in Augusta, GA. Lists of hospitalized patients and emergency department logs have been obtained for all of the facilities treating victims of the chlorine exposure. Plans are to interview as many people as possible that received medical treatment following their exposure. Workers on duty at the mills that did not seek medical care and a sample of residents from within a one-mile radius of the crash site will also be surveyed.

Throughout the event, public information and risk communications played a key role. Accurate information was essential during the "sheltering in place" phase and later when the evacuation order was given. Periodic news media briefings were held to keep the public informed of the events and activities. DHEC spokespersons participated in tracking the events, preparing materials for the news media and public and in the news briefings.

As Graniteville residents were allowed to return to their homes, DHEC staff were posted in the neighborhoods as community information liaisons to provide information and answer questions.

DHEC staff participated in the process of inspecting homes with suspected wiring damage due to the corrosion of the wiring by the chlorine vapors.

The following are some examples of press coverage that did emerge from the Graniteville chlorine leak episode.

*Example 3: Published news clippings*

Source: Environment News Service Article can be found at:  
[www.ensnewswire.com/ens/jan2005/2005-01-10-04.asp](http://www.ensnewswire.com/ens/jan2005/2005-01-10-04.asp)

## **Chlorine Gas From South Carolina Train Crash Kills Nine**

**AIKEN, South Carolina**, January 10, 2005 (ENS) - Nine men have died after a 42 car Norfolk Southern freight train slammed into a parked train on a side track in the small town of Graniteville, South Carolina early Thursday. Fourteen cars on the moving train derailed, including three chlorine tank cars, one of which leaked a cloud of deadly green gas.

Aiken County Coroner Tim Carlton said Saturday that eight of the deaths resulted from inhalation of chlorine gas from the leaking tank car. The exception is the engineer of the moving train, who died in the crash.

Six textile mill workers, along with the train engineer; a truck driver and a man who was found in his Main Street home, died of chlorine inhalation, Carlton said.

Officials are concerned about the whereabouts of several other workers who are still missing.

***Chlorine gas escaped from a tank car ruptured when a moving train slammed into a parked one in Graniteville, South Carolina. (Photo courtesy Aiken County Public Safety)***

Besides the nine fatalities, at least 234 people went to area hospitals, most with respiratory illness from inhaling chlorine gas. Of the 58 people admitted, 38 were still in hospital Saturday, five in critical condition.



Authorities ordered all 5,400 people within a mile of the railroad crash to evacuate in the afternoon because the chlorine was still leaking from the tank car, forming a choking, toxic plume. Officials say many residents will not be able to return to their homes before Wednesday at the earliest because more chlorine could still leak from the tank.

Crews have used plastic sheets to temporarily stop the leak, but the chlorine is expected to penetrate the plastic shortly. Sodium hydroxide was pumped into the damaged tank car to change the chlorine to a chemical similar to household bleach, that can be pumped into tanker trucks. Crews must also remove the chlorine from the other two tank cars - one is damaged, but not ruptured.

A two-mile no entry zone around the crash site imposed Thursday was changed to a one-mile radius Saturday night, but Hunt said the no entry zone will remain in place until at least Wednesday.

"There is a potential for another release," Aiken County Sheriff Michael Hunt said at a press conference Saturday, after meeting with hazardous materials experts.

National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) spokeswoman Debbie Hersman said Saturday that chlorine concentrations at the site remained at "unsafe levels." Each of the three chlorine cars was fully loaded with about 90 tons of pressurized liquid chlorine, Hersman said.

Thom Berry, spokesman for the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control, said that as of Friday night, an estimated 60 to 70 tons had escaped from the leaking car, leaving it about one-third full.

South Carolina Governor Governor Mark Sanford and the Aiken County Council have declared states of emergency to provide maximum assistance with the aftermath of Thursday's train collision in Graniteville. Resources have been mobilized from many agencies within Aiken County, across South Carolina, and from Georgia to provide medical, decontamination, and security services. Cleanup is expected to take several days.

The U.S. Transportation Department and the Federal Railroad Administration sent nine experts to the scene to assist the National Transportation Safety Board in its investigation.

The team, which includes the department's top railroad hazardous materials expert, also will conduct a separate investigation into the circumstances surrounding the breach of the chlorine tank car to determine precisely how the derailment led to the release of chlorine gas.

"We are concerned about the nature of the incident and the tragic loss of life and are committed to a thorough review in order to ensure the safe operation of the railroad and the well-being of residents living in the Aiken community," said Robert Jamison, acting administrator of the Federal Railroad Administration.

The Chlorine Institute, a trade association, activated CHLOREP, its Chlorine Emergency Response Plan, and dispatched an emergency response team trained in handling chlorine to the accident site. The team is working with the NTSB and state and local officials. "The Chlorine Institute is offering assistance to the South Carolina Governor's office," said President Kathleen Shaver. "The Chlorine Institute wants to understand what caused this tragedy so it won't happen again."



**Aiken County Sheriff Michael Hunt (Photo courtesy Aiken County Sheriff's Department)**

Crews worked Sunday to plug the leak that sent green clouds of gas over the surrounding mill buildings and residential neighborhoods.

The FBI is investigating the position of a switch that controls access to the siding. It was in the wrong position when the moving train hit the stationary train that had been parked on the siding for more than seven hours.

The moving train was heading from Augusta, Georgia to Columbia, South Carolina. The crash site is just 20 minutes away from the Savannah River Site (SRS), a federal Department of Energy (DOE) nuclear research and storage facility. Early Thursday morning, SRS sent a four man hazardous materials team to help with searches and evacuations, said DOE spokesman Bill Taylor.

Local Graniteville, Aiken and Augusta responders had benefited from training with the SRS crews. Aiken officials also took advantage of SRS computers, which calculated weather conditions to predict where the chlorine cloud might drift, Taylor said.

Shortly after the crash and evacuation, Norfolk Southern established a temporary emergency Local Assistance Center to handle payment of expenses and losses to people impacted by the accident.

"It is our intent through the settlement of claims involving incidental expenses, inconvenience, evacuation costs and substantiated property damage to ease the impact of the accident and evacuation on the community," the company said in a statement. Settlements of these claims "does not preclude submission of personal injury claims, claims for subsequently incurred incidental expenses, and unforeseen property damage claims in the future," the company stated.

All claims will be handled by the local Norfolk Southern claims office. Claims can be presented at the company's Local Assistance Center in Aiken while it remains open. Call 642-7119 or 800/230-7049.

Or contact Thomas Tate, Senior Claim Agent, Norfolk Southern Railway, 1770 Andrews Road, Columbia SC 29201, Phone: 803-733-3993; Fax: 803-733-3936.

This is the second deadly train crash in Graniteville in the past two months. In November, five mill employees were killed when their car was struck near the same location by another Norfolk Southern train.

Example 2 published by CNN can be found at:  
[www.cnn.com/2005/US/01/06/train.collision/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2005/US/01/06/train.collision/index.html)

## **Train collision releases chlorine gas**

### **Two killed, dozens injured in South Carolina accident**

Thursday, January 6, 2005 Posted: 7:18 PM EST (0018 GMT)

**GRANITEVILLE, South Carolina (CNN) -- Two people were killed and dozens injured when a freight train collided with a stopped train early Thursday near Graniteville, South Carolina. Potentially lethal chlorine gas leaked from some of the derailed cars, officials said.**

One of those killed was the engineer on one of the Norfolk Southern trains involved in the accident, said rail line spokeswoman Susan Terpay.

Authorities confirmed a second death, but did not say whether that person was on the train.

South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford declared a state of emergency for Aiken County.

A northbound Norfolk Southern freight train made up of two locomotives and 42 rail cars, three of which were carrying chlorine, apparently struck a locomotive and two rail cars that were stopped parallel to the main rail line, Terpay said. She said it was not clear how many cars had derailed.

Thom Berry, a spokesman for the state Department of Health and Environmental Control, told The Associated Press that two other hazardous materials, cresol and sodium hydroxide, were being carried on the train in liquid form.

Two decontamination sites were set up, and a team from the National Transportation Safety Board was on its way to the scene.

The collision occurred shortly before 2:40 a.m., said Aiken County sheriff's Lt. Michael Frank.

Another item you might consider including with the press kit if applicable is an invitation to the media to cover an event. (Obviously not applicable in the case of a natural or human-made disaster or other inherently newsworthy event.)

Template: Inviting Media to cover event

Date

Name of Reporter, Editor

Name of Newspaper, Radio or TV Station

Street Address

City, State, ZIP

Dear (*Title, Name*),

I would like to invite you to (*location*) to cover (*the meeting/event*) as part of the (*event*). *Add sentence or two about the event here.*

*Write paragraph about the goals here.*

I will be in touch with you to see whether you can cover our event, or you can reach me by phone at (*phone number*) or by email at (*email address*). In the meantime, if you would like to learn more about (*organization*), please visit the website at (*website address*).

Sincerely,

Your name

Your organization

## **Press Kit Checklist**

These steps can help guide you through the process of putting a press kit together.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Determine what media to invite
- \_\_\_\_\_ Along with the press kit, send a letter inviting a reporter to cover the event (about a week in advance of your event).
- \_\_\_\_\_ Make follow-up calls to reporters to determine their interest (a day or two before your event).
- \_\_\_\_\_ Try to get your event included in appropriate press daybooks.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Obtain photo/media releases for participants (if required).
- \_\_\_\_\_ Write a press release (See Module 1) about your event to give to reporters attending your event (this information will help them write their story).
- \_\_\_\_\_ Make copies of your press release to hand out to reporters as background information.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Make copies of any other relevant handout materials, such as project documents or research materials.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have a sign-in sheet so you know what reporters covered your event.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ask someone to take photos to submit to the community newspaper.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Send a thank-you note to reporters who covered the event.

#### **Activity 4- Create a press kit**

Ask students to create a press kit for a public health topic they are working on. If they wish, instead of inventing a fictional health agency, they can use a one-page organizational background sheet from an existing organization.

### **After the press kit is disseminated...**

#### **Give the press a call**

After you have sent a press packet, give each reporter or news director/editor a call. Rather than simply asking whether they received your press packet, use this opportunity to introduce yourself and your organization and indicate how you can be a resource to them. Let them know that they can contact you if they have any questions. You can also share with them any upcoming events that you might be having. However, keep the focus primarily on you and your organization as a resource in this relationship-building phase.

**Helpful tip:** In addition to the press kit consider posting your press release in the Associated Press daybook.

#### **What Is the Daybook?**

The daybook provides members of the media with a daily calendar of media events happening in and around a city or state. News services, like the Associated Press, maintain a daybook and

distribute it through their wire services to journalists nationwide. In addition to a national daybook, AP publishes state and local versions. Newsroom managers, assignment editors and reporters from other media outlets check the daybook many times each day for the latest updates on important events happening throughout the region.

A daybook listing looks similar to this:

May 2, 2007

Public Meeting

Discussion: Public Health Consequences from Chlorine Gas

Participants: XXXXX, Director of Health Services

Location: Department of Health and Environmental Control

Contact: Jane Doe, 404-000-0000, XXXX@dhr.state.us

### **How can you make certain that your media events get listed on the daybook?**

You must pitch your activity to the daybook editor in advance of the event in order to have it placed on the calendar of news events for a specific day. Getting the event on the daybook tells journalists in your community that an event is happening, lets them know who will be participating, and gives them a hint about the news that will be released. Pitching a daybook editor should not replace directly contacting other reporters or local print and broadcast media outlets about your event.

### **How to pitch and place stories on the Associated Press daybook**

Pitch events that include one or all of the following elements:

1. New and newsworthy information, such as the release of new data, the announcement of strong community involvement in one of your initiatives, or a news conference with local dignitaries.
2. Media-friendly activities that are visually appealing (e.g., a health fair, youth build or clean-up effort).
3. A schedule of your activities, including a list of spokespeople who are available to speak to reporters about your event or story idea.
4. Prepare a news advisory with the “who,” “what,” “when” and “where” of your event as well as any other information to be included in the daybook listing.
5. Consult the state-by-state listing of AP bureaus at [www.ap.org/pages/contact/contact.html](http://www.ap.org/pages/contact/contact.html).
6. Call the daybook editor, pitch your event, and fax or e-mail a copy of your news advisory to the bureau at least one week in advance of the event. While daybooks are updated on a regular basis,

most reporters look at the Monday daybook to plan their week. Make sure the advisory is sent to the daybook by the Friday prior to the event.

7. Follow up with the daybook editor by phone or e-mail to find out if your event is listed. When you are contacting the daybook editor, you might say, “I’m just checking if my event is on the daybook.”
8. When you are contacting local reporters, refer to the daybook listing in your pitch. For example, you might say “You may have seen our event on the AP daybook. I’m calling to give you additional information about ...”
9. Update the daybook editor if there are changes in your event location or time or if prominent speakers join your efforts.

### **When to Contact the Media**

#### **Print**

It is best to call a newsroom between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m., when reporters are likely to be available and not on deadline.

#### **Television**

Planning editors generally take calls between 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m., but not around noontime when they are putting together their mid-day news show. It is best to call the assignment desk after the morning planning meeting, which usually ends between 9:30 and 10:00 a.m. Do not forget to describe the story’s visuals when making your pitch.

#### **Radio**

The best time to call is early in the morning—between 7:30 and 8:30 a.m. After that, the staff goes into planning meetings. You can make another round of calls at about 10:00 a.m. News directors, reporters and producers are often gone by the afternoon. If you are pitching a specific press conference or event and the reporter is not able to attend, offer to have one of your staff do a taped interview.

#### **Online media**

Reporters who write for online publications often have revolving deadlines, but, as a general rule, you should follow the same rules that apply to print reporters. Call between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.

# Module 3: The art of being interviewed by the media

**Resource:** The following section was adapted primarily from two resources, Community Toolbox (For more information on this topic go to: <http://ctb.ku.edu>) and “Introduction to Media Relations” (1992) by Bob Howard, Office of Public Affairs and Carol Robinson, Office of the Director,

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, sponsored by the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials and the Public Health Foundation, in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/Public Health Training Network. For more information on how to obtain this resource go to: [http://bookstore.phf.org/product\\_info.php?products\\_id=39](http://bookstore.phf.org/product_info.php?products_id=39)

### **The art of being interviewed**

If a reporter is interested in your story, it is likely that he or she will want to interview you. No two interviews will be alike. How they turn out will depend on the rapport you establish with the reporter, on the subject, and on how newsworthy your story is. Here are some tips on what to do -- and what not to do -- during media interviews.

There are three major reasons for agreeing to do an interview: 1) to inform the public, 2) to tell your side of the story; and 3) to give good news about what your agency is doing on an issue. Simply gaining exposure for yourself or for your organization is not a good reason for granting an interview. You must have a well-conceived outcome in mind when agreeing to an interview.

### **Know what the interview is about**

The first thing you have to do is decide whether you will grant the interview. Find out why a reporter is calling, give yourself time to prepare, then call back. To help you decide, answer the following questions:

- What does the reporter want to talk about?
- Are you the appropriate person to answer questions on this topic?
- What medium does the reporter work for?
- What is the format of the interview? Nightly news? Feature story? Will the interview be taped? Will you be on camera live?
- Where will the interview be conducted? How long will it take?
- What is the reporter's deadline?
- Are there any potential public relations liabilities to such an interview?

### **Have a message**

Once you know the subject of the interview. The information you need to have ready includes:

- Dates and times
- Names of the people involved
- Your objective
- Prices
- Locations
- Contact information
- Prepare three to five key points you want to make

### **An interview is not a conversation**

The media are your conduit to the public. Speak to the public, not the reporter. Be friendly, but

remember that interviews are how reporters conduct business.

**There's no such thing as off the record**

An "off the record" comment may not be attributed to you, but that doesn't mean it won't appear in the paper or be used to confirm information.

**Tell the truth**

The truth is bound to come out eventually so it is better to be honest from the start.

**Be particularly aware of reporters' deadlines**

Reporters have a job to do and so do the editors. The deadline may be weeks – or minutes away. You being respectful for other people's deadlines will go a long way in ensuring positive media relations in the future.

**Listen to the question carefully**

Some people are really good at listening before talking, others are not and begin engaging before listening to the whole question or processing the question. Do yourself and the reporter a favor by listening to carefully to the question. If you do not understand the question it is alright to ask for clarification.

**Keep it simple**

Nothing ruins an interview faster than long, complex explanations. If you want your message conveyed, be sure to say it simply.

**Be brief**

Practice answering questions in 20 seconds or less. Chances are, the reporter will use the first decent 20-second comment and skip much of the rest. It will also help if you have a couple of quotes ready.

**Outline your main points**

Once you've decided to grant an interview, you should prepare three to five points that will get your message across as briefly as possible – preferably in 20 seconds or less. Ask yourself these questions:

- What is the issue?
- What is your involvement in the issue?
- Why is it important?
- What is the historical perspective?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Office of Communication/Media Relations develop a single overriding health communication objective (SOHCO) statement for communications with the press. A SOHCO usually consists of one sentence that sums up the most important aspect of what is being communicated followed by several statements that support or qualify that sentence. The next time you see the Director of the CDC on the television see if you can pick out their SOHCO.

**It is okay to rephrase the question**

However, be clear that you are rephrasing the question to give an accurate answer.

**It is okay to repeat an answer**

At times a reporter or information seeker may not like your answer (or find the answer incomplete) and will ask it again. As a result, some people who are trying to be helpful will go off on tangents that seem contradictory. You can always repeat what you said.

**Understand that everything you say will not be printed**

A reporter may have a different agenda than you and hence, everything you say may not appear in print.

**Some of what you say may not be accurately printed**

Reporters make mistakes on occasion. That is why it is vital that you are give them lucid answers It is acceptable for you to repeat the main message over in different ways.

**Activity 5-** Using CDC's Office of Communication/Media Relations MMWR SOHCO template below, create a SOHCO for a health-related event that is relevant to your interests.

## Office of Communication/Media Relations MMWR SOHO

In one paragraph, please state the key point or objective of your MMWR submission. This statement should reflect what you, the writer, would like to see as the lead paragraph in a newspaper story or in a broadcast news report about your submission.

List three facts or statistics you would like the public to remember as a result of reading or hearing about your article?

What is the main audience or population segment you would like this article to reach?

What is the one message the audience needs to take from this article?

Who in your office will serve as the point-of-contact for media questions?

Primary	Secondary
---------	-----------

Name: Degree(s): Phone:\*Title: Division/Center: Date and time available:

Source: Center for Disease Control and Prevention

([http://www.cdc.gov/dhdsp/CDCynergy\\_training/Content/activeinformation/resources/SOHCO\\_Worksheet.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/dhdsp/CDCynergy_training/Content/activeinformation/resources/SOHCO_Worksheet.pdf))

Here are some pointers for you to keep in mind before and during the interview:

- Prepare yourself for the questions in advance. If possible, ask for a sample of questions.
- Be familiar with the topic of the interview.
- Dress appropriately.
- Don't be afraid of sounding ignorant by asking the reporter to repeat questions.
- Never answer rudeness with rudeness.
- Before wrapping the interview, make sure you made your point clear. Recap with the interviewer if necessary.
- Watch and listen.
- Stay relaxed and be yourself while watching what you say.
- If you cite names, occupations and addresses, get them right.
- Think about ideas for pictures.
- Try not to use jargon; readers understand simple English better.
- Prepare some catchy responses that address things you particularly want to highlight, and look for opportunities to throw them in.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, just admit it and offer to find it out.
- Be sure to steer clear from stereotypes and biases --being offensive is rarely effective.

Be attentive to all the parts of the interview. At times, the most important question for the story may be buried in the interview.

The reporter is probably going to use a tape recorder to enhance the accuracy of the story. Reporters will usually ask for permission to use a tape recorder and once you grant the permission, be extra careful with what you say. Behave as if you are being recorded, whether you are or not. Do not be intimidated or silenced by a tape recorder, though. Speak naturally, and give it a break when it is necessary to change tape sides.

Remember that what you want is to grab the readers' or spectators' attention. To do that, the simplest ways are the best. Keep your sentences short, your introduction brief and to the point, and your approach straightforward.

Here is an easy outline to remember.

- First Sentence-Make a statement that answers the reporter's question as briefly as possible.
- Second Sentence-Support your answer.
- Third Sentence-Transition into your message.
- Fourth Sentence-State your message.

### **Gather background information**

Background materials are helpful to a reporter, particularly if a topic is complex.

### **Anticipate tough questions and prepare your answers**

List the ten most difficult questions you might be asked regarding the interview topic and the ten

most difficult questions in general. Think about how you will transition from answering these questions into a key point you want to make.

**Resource:** CDCynergy (<http://www.orau.gov/cdcynergy/erc>) provides a list of questions that are most likely to be asked during an emergency situation. Use the following questions to develop appropriate answers about a specific event.

What is your name and title?  
What happened or, what is happening?  
What measures are being taken?  
Has this ever happened before?  
Who is involved?  
Is anyone to blame?  
Is there danger now?  
Do you accept responsibility?  
How much will this cost?  
Was anyone hurt or killed? What are their names?  
How much damage was caused?  
When will we find out more?  
What can private citizens do to help?

### **Rehearse**

After you make a list of potential questions, go over your answers until you are confident you can handle each and every one. Do not read your answers during the interview.

**A word of caution:** Do not say anything you don't want to hear on the news or read in the paper tomorrow morning. Quotes can be taken out of context, jokes can end up in the headline, and a badly placed word can tarnish your organization for a long time. Watch out for any libelous and offensive statements. If you want to be off the record (that is, say something that is not official part of the interview), you have to say so before you start talking, not after. A word of caution, off-the-records statement might still be used, although not attributed to you. You'll be on the safe side if you assume that everything you say is on the record and could be used by the media.

### **Make sure you speak loudly and clearly**

Speak up. Use broad gestures and tone of voice. Smile when it's appropriate. Long after you have appeared on a television or radio show, people will remember you and the impression you made. That impression should be of a confident, thoughtful, caring individual

### **Personal space**

Be prepared for a necessary closeness with a television interviewer, for the camera's sake. You may be rubbing shoulders or bumping knees with the interviewer, or talking with a microphone in your face. Do not back away.

### **Gestures**

Gestures are a means of using stress energy effectively. It is acceptable to gesture.

### **Sitting**

Sit up straight. Don't swivel or rock.

Cross your legs at the knees or sit with your legs at a 45 degree angle in the chair, legs crossed at ankles or feet together, one in front of the other.

In the television studio, do not jump out of your seat too quickly. The show's credits may be rolling over the scene of you sitting on the set. Consider yourself on camera until the show's director says you are finished.

Do not lean on the arm rest of the chair, you look too casual. Lean forward a little, showing interest, not back, showing fear or indifference.

### **Standing**

Stand up straight. Beware of slouching and tilted shoulders. Don't rock forward and back or sway side to side.

Keep your hands at your sides or bend your elbows slightly at your waist. Do not put your hands in your pockets, do not hold them in front of you and do not cross your arms over your chest. If you are uncomfortable with your hands at your sides, try holding a notebook or other "prop."

### **Head**

Hold your head high. Do not tilt it to one side.

Beware of being an "active listener" and nodding in apparent agreement to comments with which you may not agree.

### **Eyes**

TV cameras get much closer to your face than most people, so your eye movement is critical.

Do not look at the camera. Look at the reporter 100 percent of the time. Focus on the bridge of their nose if you are uncomfortable looking into their eyes continuously. Pay attention to what's happening or you may be embarrassed when the camera catches your eyes wandering.

Do not look up at the ceiling or down at the floor.

Don't shift your eyes from side to side.

### **Voice**

When asked by a sound engineer to give a voice level, use this opportunity to "set the stage" for the interview. The engineer wants to know your voice's normal speaking level so say your name, title and what you would like to talk about.

Beware of leaning toward and away from a stationary microphone while you are talking, as this causes your voice to become louder and softer.

In a radio interview, your voice is all you have, so beware of speaking in a dull monotone. Project, be expressive, and you will come across better.

Voices sound best if they are from the lower register, yet they often get higher when people are nervous. You can lower your voice through awareness and controlled, deep breathing.

### **Clothing**

Wear clothes that are comfortable.

Solid colors or soft shades are best. A burgundy tie or scarf will reflect color onto the face. A light blue shirt or blouse, burgundy tie or scarf and navy jacket is ideal for television.

Make sure socks that are long enough to avoid a gap between your pant leg and the top of your sock.

Button a jacket when standing; unbutton when seated.

Do not wear high contrasts like black and white. Avoid horizontal stripes, hounds-tooth and other distracting patterns. Patterns such as these can look distorted on camera.

### **Stress**

Most people get butterflies in their stomachs at the idea of an interview, especially one before the camera. Be aware of how you show stress and control it. Don't allow nervous gestures, such as pulling at your hair, swinging your foot or smiling too broadly, spoil an otherwise successful interview. Nervousness vanishes with frequency. The more interviews you give, the easier they will be.

## **Additional Tips, Hints, and Suggestions**

### **“Telephone Interview Tips**

- Know who is on the other end of the line.
- Ask whether you are being recorded.
- Ask when and where the information will be used.
- Spell out difficult names and technical terms and phrases.
- Limit the time available for the interview.
- Be certain to ask for feedback from reporters to ensure that they have understood your points.

### **Radio Interview Tips**

- A live interview is very different from a taped interview.
- Watch out for verbal pauses— “Uh,” “Um,” and “You know.”
- Radio will not be as in-depth as print.
- Be careful not to repeat the negatives in a reporter’s question.

### **Suggested Transitions**

- “What I think you are really asking is¼”
- “The overall issue is¼”
- “What’s important to remember is¼”
- “It’s our policy not to discuss (x), but what I can say is¼”

### **Ten Rules for a Successful Interview**

1. Be yourself.
2. Know your message.
3. Stick to your expertise.
4. Don’t be afraid to say “I don’t know.”
5. Avoid jargon, acronyms, and statistics.
6. Be brief and to the point.
7. Personalize your answers.
8. Never repeat or introduce a negative.
9. Answer questions with:
  - A conclusion
  - An explanation/transition
  - Your core message
10. Maintain eye contact.”

Source: The above information was taken from a one-day training session called "Facing The Media". This training was presented at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia in December 2002. This information can be accessed online at:

[http://www.orau.gov/cdcynergy/erc/Face%20The%20Media%20Course%20Materials/handouts/tips\\_hints\\_suggestions.pdf](http://www.orau.gov/cdcynergy/erc/Face%20The%20Media%20Course%20Materials/handouts/tips_hints_suggestions.pdf)

### **“Coping With Sticky Situations and Trick Questions    *Or, What To Do When . . .***

#### **The interviewer expects you to comment on issues beyond your expertise.**

- Inform the interviewer that you are only prepared to answer questions related to your expertise as a spokesperson.
- Transition into key message points.
- If the interviewer persists, say “I’m sorry; I’m unable to answer your question.
- Stick to the substance of your message.

#### **The interviewer is unprepared and asks irrelevant questions.**

- Take control by reaffirming your expertise.
- Stress your key message points, feeding him questions about your topic.
- Involve the interviewer by asking questions about his experiences and concerns.

#### **The interviewer/guest keeps interrupting you in mid-sentence.**

- When it happens again, say “I will be happy to respond to your comment, but first let me finish with mine.”
- Be pleasant, but insist on your right to give complete responses.

- Do not interrupt a questioner!

**The interviewer is particularly antagonistic and asks one hostile question after another.**

- Do not become combative. Maintain your enthusiasm.
- Do not repeat a negative question.
- Remember, you are well prepared and rehearsed.
- Answer questions with a brief response, then transition to a key message

**During a taped interview, the reporter keeps raising his voice higher and higher.**

- Don't respond by raising your voice.
- Each time the reporter raises his voice, lower yours.
- Remain calm, and stick to your message.

**A reporter puts down his microphone and says, "Let's go off the record"**

- Never go off the record with a reporter.
- Assume that anything you say in the presence of a reporter will be quoted.
- Assume that anything you say in the presence of a reporter's equipment will be quoted."

Source: The above information was taken from a one-day training session called "Facing The Media". This training was presented at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia in December 2002. This information can be accessed online at:

<http://www.orau.gov/cdcynergy/erc/Face The Media Course Materials/handouts/Coping.pdf>

### **Activity 6 -Critique a press briefing**

Students may listen to a simulated press briefing presentation at the Emergency Risk Communication site of the Northwest Center for Public Health Practice. Go to: [http://www.nwcphp.org/riskcomm/messaging/messaging\\_exercise](http://www.nwcphp.org/riskcomm/messaging/messaging_exercise). Students can compare their own critiques with one that is available at that web site.

### **After an interview:**

Thank the reporter for his or her time and offer to answer questions that may come up later. Offer to be available so the reporter can double check your quotes with you. If you don't like what a reporter wrote about your organization, keep it to yourself unless you can back up a contrary opinion with fact. If a reporter misrepresents the facts, ask for a correction in print or on the air. Always be professional and courteous with reporters (even when you don't like them).

Regardless of the circumstances of your interview - over the phone, in-person, over the radio, on television - if you can anticipate the questions the media want answered and know exactly what you want to tell them then your interview experience can be exciting and effective.

**What should you do if you're misquoted?**

Sometimes, reporters will take the liberty of editing your interview. That's quite a usual practice, aimed at making you sound better. However, sometimes this editing can misrepresent an important point you need to make. If your edited quote captures the gist of what you said, let it go. However, if what you read doesn't sound like you, or was flat-out fabricated, you should take action. Treat everyone with respect, apologize for whatever is your fault, but take steps to correct the error right away and restate your initiative's real intentions and ideas. Such steps might include sending a request for a correction on the next issue, writing a letter to the editor, or writing a column explaining that what was attributed to you doesn't reflect your actual views.

**Activity 7 – Mock interviews**

Arrange for students to practice mock interviews. One student can play the role of the reporter and the other can play the health official being interviewed. For greatest impact on student learning, the interviews should be videotaped so that students can engage in critical self-reflection.

Hint: The interview assignment will be successful only to the degree that interviewer and interviewee are both well briefed about some health event that could plausibly serve as the subject of a public health interview. Having students read well-developed case studies in preparation for the interview will be most helpful. Extensive case studies regarding environmental health issues can be obtained from the ATSDR web-site. Other sources for case studies to use in this interviewing activity include Turning Point Social Marketing National Excellence Collaborative [[www.turningpointprogram.org](http://www.turningpointprogram.org)], Health Canada's Tools of Change [<http://www.toolsofchange.com/english/casestudies.asp>], and the online journal *Cases in Public Health Communication and Marketing* [<http://www.casesjournal.org>]

**Alternative outside class activity – Attend a press briefing**

Assign your students to attend a press briefing or other health event to which the press have been invited. Information about such events can be solicited from local health agencies or from journalists. Obtain a copy of the press kit prior to attending the event if you can.

If possible, students should obtain a copy of the press sign-in sheet. That way, they can contact reporters after the fact to query about whether and how the reporters were able to craft stories about the event.

Students can also collect press clippings resulting from coverage of the event.