

# EMERGENCY PUBLIC INFORMATION

Pocket Guide



 **ORISE**

OAK RIDGE INSTITUTE FOR SCIENCE AND EDUCATION

Now in its fifth printing, this guide has been shared with more than 30,000 emergency management professionals in this nation and abroad. It is just one of the many products developed by the Emergency Management Laboratory in cooperation with the Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education.

The EML serves as an emergency management resource to the U.S. Department of Energy, its contractors, and other organizations. Among the services and products are: training course work, technology-based instruction, exercise planning, and assistance with development of comprehensive emergency management plans.

The **Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education (ORISE)** was established by the U.S. Department of Energy to undertake national and international programs in education, training, health, and the environment. ORISE and its programs are operated by Oak Ridge Associated Universities (ORAU) through a contract with the U.S. Department of Energy. Established in 1946, ORAU is a consortium of 86 colleges and universities.

This document describes activities performed under a contract between the U.S. Department of Energy and Oak Ridge Associated Universities.

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The materials in this Guide are based largely on the findings of advanced environmental communication research conducted by Dr. Vincent T. Covello and the staff of the Center for Risk Communication.

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# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	7
<b>1 - Emergency Public Information .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>2 - Being an Effective Spokesperson .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>3 - Working with the Media .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>4 - Holding a News Conference .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>5 - Writing Emergency News Releases .....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>6 - Tips for Technical Spokespersons .....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>7 - Working with Victims .....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>8 - Resource Pages and Contact Lists .....</b>	<b>84</b>
About the EML .....	Inside Back Cover





# Introduction

The Emergency Management Laboratory's Emergency Public Information Pocket Guide outlines the principles and approaches for communicating during an emergency. There is no way of knowing when a major disaster—real or perceived—will occur. Preparing for the worst and anticipating how your organization will work together to handle the concerns of the media and the public is key to protecting your organization's credibility.

Take this guide with you in the field. Refer to it when things get hairy. Use the back to take notes and write down useful contacts. Jot down the lessons learned on the back note pages, and plan to share them with us later.



# Emergency Public Information

The purpose of Emergency Public Information is:

To protect health, safety, and the environment by keeping the public informed.

To restore public confidence in the organization's ability to manage an incident.

## Target Audiences

- ◆ Offsite population
  - General population
  - Special populations  
(non-English speaking, special needs, etc.)
  - Government officials
  
- ◆ Onsite population
  - Site personnel
  - Families
  - Visitors
  - Employees
    - Emergency workers
    - Nonemergency workers
    - People involved in a shift change



## What the Public Wants to Know in an Emergency

### **Timely and accurate facts:**

- ✓ What happened?
- ✓ What is the impact?
- ✓ What is being done?

### **Magnitude:**

- ✓ How big is the risk area (am I affected?)
- ✓ How much “stuff” has been released?
- ✓ How many people have been or will be affected?

### **Immediacy:**

- ✓ How soon will the public be affected?
- ✓ How soon will they need to do something about it?

### **Duration:**

- ✓ How long will it last?
- ✓ When can people go home?
- ✓ When will things be back to normal?
- ✓ Will it happen again?

### **Control of an emergency:**

- ✓ Who is in charge?
- ✓ Do they have control over the event?
- ✓ Can the problems be corrected?

## How the Public Needs the Information

### **Short, concise, focused information:**

- 12 -year-old level

### **Relevant information:**

- Cut to the chase

### **Empathy/caring:**

- Put yourself in the public's shoes

### **Visuals that enhance communication:**

- Maps
- Graphics

## What the Public Does Not Need to Hear

### **Technical jargon:**

- Technical details
- Engineering/scientific terms
- Jargon/acronyms

### **Irrelevant information:**

- Details about response/recovery that are not relevant to the general public
- Negative information that is not relevant to the general public

### **Arrogant or bad attitudes:**

- Delivering this information is a function of customer service

## Get the Facts

Use the format below as a guide for collecting information that the media and the general public will want to know:

Time:

Date:

Phone:

What happened:

Location:

Time of incident:

Date of incident:

Injuries:

Impact on the community:

Hazardous materials involved?

Yes:

No:

Type Name:

Effects:

Uses:

Protective Actions:

Areas Affected:

Shelters:

## Notes



## Notes

## Notes





# Being an Effective Spokesperson

2

## A Spokesperson's Checklist

Get prepared and plan ahead for any emergency by setting aside the following items

- Extra coats, rain gear, layered clothes, sweaters, socks, towels, and boots
- A briefcase with pens, paper, business cards, appropriate forms, area maps, and media contacts
- A portable telephone, a portable computer, a pager, a portable fax, any means of satellite communication
- Packs of snacks, crackers, fruit, water, etc. Nourishment that will keep you going in the absence of a meal

Once on the scene, identify where you and reporters can:

- ✓ Get shelter
- ✓ Use the restroom
- ✓ Have access to electrical outlets
- ✓ Get coffee and a hot meal
- ✓ Set up “live” satellite trucks

- ✓ Use the telephone in private

*See also: Media Needs in an Emergency (Page 38)*

## How to be an Effective Spokesperson

(Source: Vincent T. Covello)

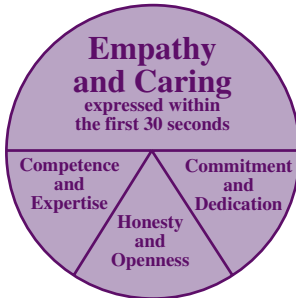
### The Factors in Assessing Trust and Credibility

The messenger must be perceived as trustworthy and credible.

There are four factors that the public perceives as crucial for building trust and credibility, and those factors are:

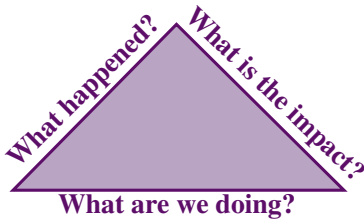
- 1) Empathy and caring
- 2) Competence and expertise
- 3) Honesty and openness
- 4) Commitment and dedication

According to research, being perceived as empathetic and caring provides greater opportunity for your message to be received and acted upon.





## The Crisis Response Message Triangle



Every message a spokesperson delivers should cover all three aspects of the message triangle.

- 1) Early in the event, the health and safety impact on community members should be primary, followed by what actions are being taken to manage and rectify the situation.
- 2) The “what happened” facts should be released as they are confirmed with frequent updates as any new information becomes available.
- 3) As the event concludes, the “what are we doing” will deal with the recovery effort. Be prepared to answer questions about what is involved in restoring the area.

The supporting facts of the event should be included with the elements of the message triangle. These include:

- ✓ Five Ws (Who, What, When, Where, Why) and one H (How)

- ✓ Speed of response
- ✓ Who is involved
- ✓ What resources have been brought to the site
- ✓ Status
- ✓ Advice to the public
- ✓ Cooperation
- ✓ Safety to the community and workers
- ✓ Protection and preservation of the environment

## How much Information Should a Spokesperson Provide?

Guidelines exist: Be familiar with your organization's policies regarding the release of information. Every agency should have a current policy regarding on-scene media relations that has been reviewed by the agency's legal advisor.

A cold or offhand remark can set a negative tone for a story that would otherwise be positive for the agencies involved.

Detailed information or questions should be held and referred to the appropriate spokesperson when he or she arrives at the scene and receives a complete briefing.

Unless policy indicates otherwise, refrain from releasing the following:

- Identity of victims  
(those injured or deceased)
- Identity of juveniles
- Specific investigative information

- Security information about personnel or agencies involved
- Any information that could be harmful to an individual, unless the public's right to know outweighs the individual's privacy interest

## Guidelines for Answering Questions

- ◆ Be prepared
  - 90 to 95 percent of all questions can be anticipated.
  - Develop and practice your response.
- ◆ Determine who will answer questions about specific subject matters
- ◆ Listen
  - Recognize the underlying issue associated with your question, and determine if it is an issue that will come up again or has the potential to become controversial.
- ◆ Keep answers short and focused
  - All answers should be less than two minutes long.
- ◆ Practice self management
  - Control your emotions.
- ◆ Speak and act with integrity
  - Tell the truth. Follow up on issues. Remember that at all times that you are speaking for your organization.

## Avoiding the Spokesperson Pitfalls

(Source: Vincent T. Covello)

### JARGON

**Do:**

Define all technical terms and acronyms.

**Don't:**

Use language that may not be understood.

### HUMOR

**Do:**

Direct it at yourself, if used at all.

**Don't:**

Use it in relation to health, safety, or environmental issues.

### NEGATIVE ALLEGATIONS

**Do:**

Refute the allegation, without repeating it.

**Don't:**

Repeat or refer to the allegation.

### NEGATIVE WORDS AND PHRASES

**Do:**

Use positive or neutral terms.

**Don't:**

Refer to national problems, e.g.,  
“This is not Love Canal.”

### RELIANCE ON WORDS

**Do:**

Use visuals to emphasize key points.

**Don't:**

Rely entirely on words.

## TEMPER

**Do:**

Remain calm. Use a question or an allegation to springboard into something positive.

**Don't:**

Let your feelings interfere with your ability to communicate positively.

## CLARITY

**Do:**

Ask whether you have made yourself clear.

**Don't:**

Assume you have been understood.

## ABSTRACTIONS

**Do:**

Use examples, stories, and analogies to establish an understanding.

**Don't:**

Talk only in abstractions.

## NONVERBAL MESSAGES

**Do:**

Be sensitive to nonverbal messages that you are communicating.

**Don't:**

Allow your body language, your position in the room, or your dress to be inconsistent with your message.

## **ATTACKS**

### **Do:**

Attack the issue.

### **Don't:**

Attack a person or organization.

## **PROMISES**

### **Do:**

Promise only what you can deliver. Set and then follow strict guidelines.

### **Don't:**

Make promises you can't keep or fail to follow up on promises.

## **GUARANTEES**

### **Do:**

Emphasize achievements made and ongoing efforts.

### **Don't:**

Say there are no guarantees.

## **SPECULATION**

### **Do:**

Provide information on what is being done.

### **Don't:**

Speculate about worst case scenarios.

## **MONEY**

### **Do:**

Refer to the importance you attach to health, safety, and the environment; your moral obligation to public health outweighs financial considerations.

**Don't:**

Refer to the amount of money that has been spent as representation of your organization's concern.

**ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY****Do:**

Use personal pronouns.

**Don't:**

Take on the identity of a large organization.

**BLAME****Do:**

Take responsibility for your share of the problem.

**Don't:**

Try to shift blame or responsibility to others.

**OFF THE RECORD****Do:**

Assume everything you say and do is part of the public record.

**Don't:**

Make side comments or "confidential" remarks.

**RISKS/BENEFITS/COST COMPARISONS****Do:**

Discuss risks and benefits in separate communication.

**Don't:**

Discuss your costs along with risk levels.

## RISK COMPARISONS

**Do:**

Use them to help put risks in perspective.

**Don't:**

Compare unrelated risks.

## HEALTH RISK NUMBERS

**Do:**

Stress that true risk is between zero and the worst-case estimate. Base actions upon federal/state standards rather than risk numbers.

**Don't:**

State absolutes. Expect laypersons to understand.

## Examples of Opening Statements

Use these examples to begin a statement or when tackling a particularly difficult question.

- I want to share with you information pertaining to this accident/event/incident . . .
- My goal is to keep you informed with the latest, confirmed information regarding this incident . . .
- As a resident of this community . . .
- I know that you're are interested in . . . and I pledge to do everything I can to keep you informed . . .
- I want to apologize to you for the inconvenience caused by . . .
- It appears that we all are interested in the health and safety of our community, our workers, residents of our community, our first responders, our environment, etc . . .



- Looking at this situation from your perspective, I also feel . . .
- I live nearby as well, and I am interested in . . .
- I have been in contact with (the incident commander, police department, fire department, etc.) attempting to get the most up-to-date information about what and how this happened.
- As a resident of this community, I am interested in the safety and well-being of our families and our neighbors.
- I am here to share with you the knowledge and confidence I have in the first responders' abilities to protect the citizens or our community.
- I agree that . . . is important.
- If I were in your shoes and reading/hearing/seeing the things you have, I would be asking the same questions.
- If it is an important question to you, then it is an important question to me . . .
- The issue(s) you have raised is/are at the top of my list of priorities . . .
- I also care about . . .
- My first priority is . . .
- In listening to your question, I can sense your frustration about . . .
- I have asked myself the very same question . . .

## Managing Hostile Situations

### **Keep in mind:**

- Emergency issues can arouse strong emotions, including anger and hostility.

- Hostility is usually directed at you as a representative of an organization, not you as an individual.
- Effectively managing hostility can build trust and credibility.

### **Suggested approaches:**

- Acknowledge the existence of hostility. Send a message of confidence.
- Practice self management. Display confidence, concentration, and momentum. Listen.
- Be prepared. Plan, prepare, and practice your presentation and anticipated questions and answers.
- Communicate empathy and caring. Recognize people's frustration. Use eye contact. Assume a listening posture. Answer questions carefully and thoughtfully.
- Track key messages. Use positive words. Turn negatives into positives. Bridge back to the key messages.

## Some Dos and Don'ts of Listening

The ability to listen effectively is crucial when faced with people who have a wide range of agendas requiring attention. The ability to hear and respond well to what people are saying requires practice and experience.

**Do:**

Become aware of your listening habits.

**Don't:**

Mistake not talking for listening.

**Do:**

Share responsibility for the communication.

**Don't:**

Fake listening.

**Do:**

Concentrate on what the speaker is saying.

**Don't:**

Interrupt needlessly.

**Do:**

Listen for the total meaning, including feelings.  
Observe the speaker's nonverbal signals.

**Don't:**

Pass judgement too quickly.  
Make arguing an ego trip, don't argue.

**Do:**

Adopt an accepting attitude.

**Don't:**

Ever tell a speaker, "I know exactly how you feel."

**Do:**

Express empathetic understanding.

**Don't:**

Overreact to emotional words.

**Do:**

Listen to yourself.

**Don't:**

Give advice unless it is requested.

**Do:**

“Close the loop” of listening by taking appropriate action.

**Don't:**

Use listening as a way of hiding yourself.

## Notes

2

## Notes



## Notes

2



## Working with the Media

Here are a number of things to keep in mind when preparing for media interviews:

- Use the interview as an opportunity to deliver your message. Use a question as an opportunity to weave in what you want the public to know.
- Be aware of what the reporter already knows and anticipate what information he or she will need. Spend preparation time by developing your own questions and answers, particularly to issues that are controversial.
- Make sure the reporter gets your name and title right.
- Don't ask to see the article or broadcast before it is run or published.
- Relax. Try to develop a rapport with the reporter and make the time worthwhile. Answer questions in a conversational tone and at your own pace.

### Interview Pitfalls

- Don't let a reporter put words in your mouth.
- If the question contains leading or loaded



language, reframe the question to eliminate the language and then answer the question.

- Be careful about the source of allegations.
- Don't argue. "Don't let them see you sweat." Do what you can to diffuse a stressful situation, and don't take things personally.
- If the reporter interrupts you before you finish an answer, calmly say, "I would like to finish my answer to your last question before I go on to the next one."
- If a reporter leaves a microphone in your face after you have completed your answer, say, "That was my answer to the question, do you have another question that I need to address?"
- Remember, if you don't want to see it in print or hear it in broadcast, just don't say it. There is no such thing as "off the record."

## Answering the Question

- Make your point first. Be concise, say it in 30 seconds, using no more than 90 words.
- Be as brief as possible.
- Don't be evasive or try to fake it. If you don't know, tell them you will try to find out.

- Never say “no comment.” If you can’t answer the question for a particular reason, say so.
- Pay attention to your use of jargon or arcane lingo as well as statistics or acronyms.
- Don’t speak disparagingly of anyone, assign blame, or “pass the buck,” no matter how the reporter frames the question.
- If the question is not in your area of expertise, don’t try to answer it.
- Talk from the public's point of view.
- Use understandable analogies or anecdotes that will help illustrate the point.
- Don’t answer a hypothetical question. Avoid speculating by rephrasing the question on your own terms.
- Rephrase questions that attempt to get your personal opinion.
- Record sensitive interviews so that you have your own record of the conversation.
- Break down multipart questions and answer each part slowly and separately.

## Telephone Interview Tips

- Know who is it on the other end of the line.
- Be sure to know if you are being recorded.
- Know when and where the information will be used.
- Have unobstructed telephone lines to ensure comments are clearly heard.
- Obtain a reporter's phone number before the interview begins. You will need this in case you get disconnected or have to call back to provide new information.
- State key messages and stick to them.
- Spell out difficult names/technical terms/phrases.
- Use numbers/statistics with caution and clarity.
- Provide photographs/illustrations/graphs to the news organization later if appropriate for the news story.
- Have background material ready to fax or e-mail for all media unfamiliar with the issue.

## Radio Interview Tips

- Speak in “sound bites,” 5-20 words to convey information.

- Develop a key message and stick to it.
- Ask if the interview will be live, taped, or excerpted.
- Close doors and eliminate any outside noise.
- Speak in normal tones.
- Watch out for “Uh,” “Um,” and “You Know.”
- Avoid use of numbers, unless they are absolute.

## Media Terminology

### **Above the**

#### **fold:**

When a story appears on the front page and on the top half of the paper. Refers to a prominently placed story that people can see when a paper is displayed in a newspaper rack.

#### **Angle:**

In news writing, the approach to a story.

#### **AP style:**

Format for press releases following Associated Press Stylebook.

#### **Art:**

A newsprint term that refers to the photography that will accompany a news or feature story.

**Assignment**

- editor:** The person at the news organization making the decisions on which stories will get coverage.
- Billboard:** In broadcast news, all the headlines at the start of a newscast.
- Black:** A black screen on a receiver.
- Byline:** The name of the reporter who wrote a particular news story, usually printed at the top of the newspaper article.
- Copy:** News that is printed or typed. WIRE COPY is teletyped news, HARD COPY refers to complete news items on paper, distinct from LEAD COPY or FILM COPY, both written for use with other elements.
- Cover video:** A video segment used in television news to allow a reporter or anchor to “talk over.” These are general video shots, such as the outside of a house, a field, or a street, etc.
- Cue:** In a newscast, a hand signal by the stage manager to the newscaster.
- Cut-away:** Video footage of the reporter talking with you in the interview. Used for editing if needed. The cut-away shows something other than the person or places.

- Dope Sheet:** The paper on which a camera operator writes story or film information; e.g., names of crew members, story location, total film footage, developing instructions, etc.
- Evergreen:** An anytime feature.
- Feature:** A human interest story with news value not necessarily limited to the day of its occurrence, distinct from HARD NEWS.
- Head shot:** A still photo of a person's head or head and shoulders.
- Inches:** The measure used in print stories. The more column inches, the bigger the story.
- Intro:** The pre-written introduction a news story anchor reads leading into a reporter's story.
- Kicker:** A light or even humorous story used to close a newscast. Also, used to describe the last sentence of a printed news story.
- Lead:** In print terms, the first sentence of a news story that usually has some of the 5 Ws.

- Lead story:** The first story in the newscast.
- Line-up:** Arrangement of items in a newscast.
- Live shot:** In broadcast news, a reporter doing a story live from a scene.
- News desk:** Where the assignment editor is calling the shots for the day's news coverage.
- Package:** In broadcast news, a story developed by a reporter that includes an intro, sound bites, cover video, stand-ups, and other elements.
- Pool:** The combination of competing news media to achieve a particular result: e.g., several television stations in the same city agreeing to dub and share a single videotape, or major networks sharing cameras and personnel to cover an event.
- Producer:** The person who is arranging and scheduling newscast or talk shows. You'll often talk with a producer prior to the actual interview.
- Reader:** A term describing a short story that is simply read by a TV news anchor without video.
- Roll tape:** A term used by reporters who are recording the interview.

**Screener:** In radio or TV talk shows, a screener is answering the phones and filtering the host's calls.

**Sound bite:** It is the brief portion of an interview that makes it into the story—generally 7-15 seconds.

**Stand-up:** The portion of a reporter's story in which the reporter is appearing on the camera to tell the story.

**Stringer:** A freelance photographer.

**Two shot:** Refers to camera framing of two people.

**Voice over or VO:** An anchor or reporter is telling the story “over” video footage.

**Wrap:** Conclusion.

## Media Needs During an Emergency

During a crisis, emergency management personnel should furnish the following items so that the media can successfully communicate vital public information.

- Ample electrical power
- Sufficient lighting for auditorium and meeting space



- Appropriate number of telephone lines
- Use of a multiplex remote sound box
- Access to high quality graphics
- Adequate access to parking near the scene
- Agreements with local police/city agencies to block off congested streets or areas

## Media Patterns During a Crisis

Most media follow a typical pattern by:

- 1) Searching for background information.
- 2) Dispatching reporters/resources to the scene (may include both local and national coverage).
- 3) Obtaining access to the site or spokesperson.
- 4) Dramatizing the situation. Looking for the best way to get the most dramatic video or photography possible.
- 5) Expecting a instant briefing, complete with written information.
- 6) Finding immediate victims and/or people who have been affected/inconvenienced by the emergency.

- 7) Expecting YOU to panic.
- 8) Sharing information and sometimes rumors amongst themselves.
- 9) Acting professional and expecting the same from you.
- 10) Providing filler for stories if credible information is not available. This will often be delivered by nearby residents, volunteer rescue workers, etc.

## Before, During, and After a Media Interview

(Source: Vincent T. Covello and Erin Donovan)

### **Do:**

- ✓ Ask who will be conducting the interview.
- ✓ Ask which subjects the reporter wants to cover.
- ✓ Caution the reporters when you are not the correct person to be answering a particular question.
- ✓ Inquire about the format and duration of the interview.
- ✓ Ask who else will be interviewed.
- ✓ Prepare and practice.

- ✓ Be honest and accurate.
- ✓ Stick to your key message(s).

### **Don't:**

- ✓ Tell the news organization which reporter you prefer.
- ✓ Ask for specific questions in advance.
- ✓ Insist that the reporter does not ask about certain subjects.
- ✓ Demand that your remarks not be edited.
- ✓ Insist an adversary not be interviewed.
- ✓ Assume it will be easy.
- ✓ Lie or try to cloud the truth.
- ✓ Improvise or dwell on negative allegations.

### After an Interview

#### **Do:**

- ✓ Remember you are still on the record.
- ✓ Be helpful. Volunteer to get information.  
Make yourself available. Respect deadlines.

- ✓ Watch and/or read the resulting report.
- ✓ Call the reporter to politely point out inaccuracies.

**Don't:**

- ✓ Assume the interview is over or the equipment is off.
- ✓ Refuse to talk further or ask, “How did I do?”
- ✓ Ask to review the story before publication or broadcast.
- ✓ Complain to the reporter's boss first.

## The Media Interview During a Crisis

**Do:**

- ✓ Plan now.
- ✓ Respond immediately; the first 24 hours are critical.
- ✓ Respond straightforwardly.

**Don't:**

- ✓ Hope a crisis never comes.

- ✓ Let the issue be defined by someone else.
- ✓ Think that keeping a lid on the story will prevent your publics from seeking information.

## During an Interview

### Do:

- ✓ State your conclusion first, then provide supporting data.
- ✓ Be forthcoming to the extent that you decide beforehand.
- ✓ Offer to try to get information you don't currently have.
- ✓ Explain the subject and content.
- ✓ Stress the facts.
- ✓ Give a reason if you can't discuss a subject.
- ✓ Correct mistakes that you would like an opportunity to clarify.

### Don't:

- ✓ Raise issues that you don't want to see end up in the story.

- ✓ Fail to think it through ahead of time.
- ✓ Guess.
- ✓ Use jargon or assume that the facts speak for themselves.
- ✓ Speculate or discuss hypothetical situations.
- ✓ Say, “No Comment.”
- ✓ Demand an answer not be used.

## Notes

3

## Notes



## Notes

3



# Holding a News Conference

In a large-scale emergency, holding a press conference will be the most effective means of communicating information.

There are a number of steps that should be taken to prepare for and effectively communicate a news conference event. Use these steps as a guideline during your next emergency:

## Before a News Conference

Personnel involved in handling the emergency, spokespersons, and technical advisors should gather to determine the following:

- Who has the most important information? Determine who will speak for what specific issues.
- What are the key messages? (5 to 20 words)
- Who will present information for the offsite agencies?
- Set an approximate length of time needed to deliver the key messages.
- Discuss what potential questions will arise from the press and assign someone to find out any information that may be needed.

- Discuss what visuals could be used for this initial presentation.
- The affected county should lead off the news conferences if protective actions have been issued. If no protective actions have been issued, then the main spokesperson should lead. The spokesperson should act as the news conference manager and facilitate the briefing.
- The JIC news manager should notify the JIC operations manager and media services team leader that the group is leaving to conduct the briefing.
- Once the group enters the briefing area, the media services team leader should announce to the assembled press that the briefing will begin in two minutes.

## During a News Conference

The news conference manager should stand at the podium. The designated spokespersons will sit at the adjoining table, behind pre-positioned cards for the county, state, technical spokesperson, etc.

Once everyone is seated, the news conference manager should begin the conference by giving his/her name and a brief opening statement explaining the purpose of the briefing as well as the ground rules. Among those that should apply are:

- Hold all questions until all information has been presented by the speakers.
- Following the presentation, the floor will be opened for questions. The news conference manager will state that he or she will moderate the question and answer session by receiving each question and referring it to the appropriate person.
- Even when the press addresses a question directly to an individual spokesperson, that person will wait to respond until the news conference manager acknowledges the spokesperson. (eg. “Julie, will you answer that question please?”)
- The news conference manager will determine when a line of questioning has gone far enough by saying, “I think that question has been asked and answered. Next question please.”
- Ensure that someone from the news conference support team is making notes about the session and keeps a list of any information or resources that must be followed up.

## After a News Conference

Conclude the news conference by thanking all the participants and letting them know that another briefing will be held when new information becomes available. Provide an approximate time if possible. Advise reporters of how they can get additional questions answered and other resources in the interim.

Hold a quick post-conference meeting. Determine:

- ✓ Did we do what we said we would do?
- ✓ Were the key messages delivered?
- ✓ How did the prepared statement go?
- ✓ Was the information clear and concise?
- ✓ Were similar questions asked repeatedly?
- ✓ Were you or other spokespersons defensive?
- ✓ If so, why? What triggered the reaction?
- ✓ Can you detect any story lines?
- ✓ Did any rumors or misinformation exist?  
If so, was there any need to follow up  
on these issues?
- ✓ What should you do differently next time?

## News Conference Question and Answer Format

1. Express empathy and caring
  - Use a personal story.
  - Use the pronoun “I.”
  - Transition to the conclusion.
  - Use as appropriate.
2. Conclusion (key message)
  - 5-20 words
  - Positive
  - Set apart with introductory words, pauses, inflections, etc.
3. Facts
  - First fact
  - Second fact
    - Support with:
      - An analogy
      - A personal story
      - Credible third party
4. Future action
  - Specific next steps
  - More information  
(who to contact for more information)

## Question and Answer Reminders

When planning, practicing, and conducting a Q and A session, consider the following:

- **Volume**  
Your voice reflects confidence, competence, and openness. Adjust it to the surroundings.
- **Enunciation/pronunciation**  
Speak distinctly and correctly. Be careful using unfamiliar words. Spell and define terms when appropriate.
- **Pace/rhythm/pitch**  
Vary your tempo. Speak slowly to emphasize key messages, pause for emphasis, and vary the length of phrases.
- **Facial expressions and eye contact**  
Eye contact is the most important body language.
- **Posture**  
Posture communicates attitude. When standing, stand up straight. When sitting, lean forward, place both hands on the table.
- **Gestures**  
Be aware of all your gestures.
- **Dress and grooming**  
Dress appropriately for the occasion when at all possible.

- **Distractions**

Avoid repetitive gestures like clearing your throat, checking your watch, jingling keys/change, or pacing.

## The News Conference Environment

Prepare your facility for your news conference by answering the following questions:

- ✓ What is the size of the room?
- ✓ How many people will attend?
- ✓ Where will the moderator stand/sit?
- ✓ What will the seating arrangement be?
- ✓ How will the onsite or offsite seating be arranged?
- ✓ Are there any visual or audio obstacles?
- ✓ What kind of lighting is available?
- ✓ Are there ample electrical outlets?

Preparing for the conference, the following logistics should be in place:

- All equipment is set up, in focus, and in working order.



- All transparencies, slides, video clips are in proper sequence beforehand.
- All audio and visual presentations have been tested.
- If lighting must be turned off or dimmed during the news briefing, designate someone to do it.
- An area has been identified for decision makers to hold a “pre-conference huddle.”
- Materials that will be provided to the media are completed and ready for distribution.

## A Guide for Visual Aids

Visual aids should:

- Stand alone.
- Have impact.
- Help tell the story.
- Illustrate a key concept.
- Support only one major idea.
- Use pictures/graphics, rather than words, whenever possible.

- Keep text to:
  - Six words per line, maximum.
  - Six lines per visual, maximum.
  - Short phrases and key words.
- Highlight important points with color/contrast.
- Represent the facts accurately.
- Be neat, clear, and uncluttered.

## Notes

4

## Notes



## Notes

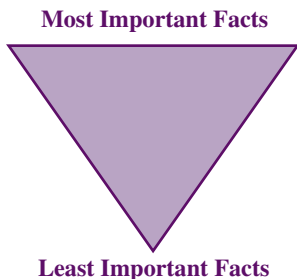


## Writing Emergency News Releases

Some guidelines to follow when preparing an emergency news release:

- 1) Be clear and use simple “language” or “wording.”
- 2) Write short sentences that contain only one basic thought.
- 3) Don’t end a sentence with a participial phrase.
- 4) Use active rather than passive language.
- 5) Avoid loose construction, don’t begin a sentence with “and” or “but.”
- 6) Don’t use vague language, use precise terminology.
- 7) Make every antecedent plain. Never permit “it” or “that” or any similar word to refer to different things in the same sentence.
- 8) Avoid successive sentences that start with the same word.
- 9) Say what you need to say with the least amount of words possible. Edit by eliminating extra and redundant words.

- 10) Spell out the complete words for all abbreviations or acronyms.
- 11) Don't generalize, editorialize, or sensationalize.
- 12) Use precise language:
  - Destroyed instead of completely destroyed.
  - Escape instead of miraculous escape.
  - Frequently instead of always.
  - Died instead of passed away.
  - Critically injured instead of not expected to live.
  - Said instead of stated.
  - Dead on arrival instead of pronounced dead on arrival.
  - Left the building rather than exited the building.
  - History rather than past history.
13. Use the Inverted Pyramid to distribute the facts, stacking the most important facts at the top of the release and the least important facts in descending order.



## Sample News Advisory and Event Release

Use the following as a guideline for writing emergency news releases

### **New Release Sample Format**

Logo (agency letterhead)

Address, city, state, zip

NEWS RELEASE (eye catching header)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (time of release)

Date:

Contact: (Name, phone number, pager number, etc.)

(Capitalize Headline with Your Agency Name and Description of the Information Contained in the Release—a brief phrase of what has occurred.)

(Place) Date - (Who, what, when, where, and how) double spaced or 1.5" between lines and justified left. No need to indent paragraphs. Follow the Associated Press stylebook. Use the last name only after reference to a full name. When referencing name for a second time, don't preface last name with a salutation like Mr. or Mrs. or chief. Limit the release to one page if possible. Stick to the facts, limit the use of adjectives scene as tragic, devastating, etc. Add quotes and attribute empathy statement to the agency spokesperson, if appropriate.

###

(signifies the end of the release)



Use this as a sample media advisory

Agency logo here

**NEWS ADVISORY**  
**For Immediate Release**

Date:

Contact:

Headline Goes Here Describing what Needs to  
be Announced to the Media

Who:

What:

When:

Where:

Summary:

###

## Guidelines for Writing for the Web

- Write straightforward, efficient headlines.
- Use bullets and bold/highlight key facts.
- Develop a solid, concise writing style.
- Use high-impact photos, tightly cropped.
- Use graphics that are interactive and require reader participation.
- Use the inverted pyramid.
- Use bullets and lists that can be easily scanned.
- Use one idea per paragraph.
- Limit to half the word count of printed information.
- Use hypertext to organize material.
- Use sources and citations for research.
- Use quoted material to enhance credibility.
- Avoid promotional “marketese-type” language.

## Web Page Development Steps

1. Prepare press release.
2. Save to Web in readable format.
3. Complete review process.
4. Copy to Web server.
5. Check links.
6. Publicize to Joint Information Center support functions [telephone team, media monitoring, spokesperson(s) media, public, etc.].
7. Maintain or remove from server.

## Notes

## Notes

## Notes





# Tips for Technical Spokespersons

## Typical Radiation Exposures

Natural background radiation and manmade radiation	360 mrem/year
Diagnostic chest x-ray	10 mrem
Flight from LA to Paris	4.8 mrem
Barium enema	800 mrem
Smoking 1.5 packs per day	16,000 mrem/year
Heart catheterization	45,000 mrem
Walking on soil	30 mrem
Potassium in your body	20 mrem
Other radio nuclides in the body	40 mrem
Radon (in the home)	200 mrem
Nuclear industry	Less than 1 mrem
Consumer products	10 mrem
Medical exposure to radiopharmaceuticals	50 mrem

## Miscellaneous Concentration Comparisons

### **Parts per million:**

- One automobile in bumper-to-bumper traffic from Cleveland to San Francisco.
- One drop of gasoline in a full-size car's tankful of gas.
- One facial tissue in a stack taller than the Empire State Building.
- One pancake in a stack four miles high.

### **Parts per billion:**

- One silver dollar in a roll of silver dollars stretching from Detroit to Salt Lake City.
- One kernel of corn in enough corn to fill a 45-foot silo, 16 feet in diameter.
- One sheet in a roll of toilet paper stretching from New York to London.

### **Parts per trillion:**

- One square foot of floor tile on a kitchen floor the size of Indiana.
- One drop of detergent in enough dishwater to fill a train of railroad tank cars 10 miles long.
- One mile on a two-month journey at the speed of light.

### **Parts per quadrillion:**

- One postage stamp on a letter the size of California and Oregon combined.
- The palm of one's hand resting on a table the size of the United States.
- One human hair out of all the hair on all the heads of all the people in the world.



- One mile on a journey of 170 light years.

Source: Adapted from data supplied by Jim Callaghan, Hill and Knowlton, Inc., as reproduced in P. Sandman, D. Sachsman, and M. Greenberg, 1987, *Risk Communication for Environmental News Sources*. Industry/University Cooperative Center for Research in Hazardous and Toxic Substances: New Brunswick, New Jersey.

## Notes



## Notes

## Notes



# Working with Victims

The role of the public information officer in working with victims:

- Obtain prior authorization from a victim to provide their name or address to a reporter.
- Always inform a victim that they have the right to refuse an interview.
- Inform the victim they have the right to discontinue the interview at any time.
- The PIO has the right to end the interview if the victim show signs of trauma during the interview.
- Victims have the right to know what types of questions or the direction the interview will be taking.

## Sensitivity to Victims and Families

Victims may still be in the shock of the trauma for several hours to days. They may not be able or ready to provide the information.

Shock usually increases emotions and decreases cognitive functions, leaving victims vulnerable to media coverage.

Victims may unknowingly provide information that is instrumental to the case being investigated.

The interview, unless controlled, may be detrimental to the victims and traumatize them again.

Interviewers tend to ask questions that are attached to highly-charged issues that connect with the very traumatic event, increasing the emotional shock reaction.

Victims may not realize the meaning behind the questions due to the traumatic event, thereby providing incorrect information or implying false assumptions.

## PIO Releases to the Media

Depending on the event and agency, certain information may not be released to the public.

You are sensitive to the mission of your agency and have determined what information is privileged at different times to protect the integrity of the event. The same holds true for the victims and their family.

Protection of certain information is essential; the disclosure of that information by a third party is protected; the same holds true for the protection of the victim and family and the exposure that impacts the hurt, grief, anger, despair, and anguish of being a victim.

Information provided and how it is provided can trigger unresolved trauma in the general public.

Severe events depicted with visual sensationalism can traumatize the public.

## Victims Rights: Dealing with the Media

Victims have the right to:

- Say “no” to an interview.
- Select the spokesperson/advocate of their choice.
- Select the time and location for interviews.
- Request a specific reporter.
- Refuse to grant an interview to a specific reporter even though they have granted interviews to other reporters.
- Release a written statement through a spokesperson in lieu of an interview.
- Exclude children from interviews.
- Refrain from answering any question(s) that make them uncomfortable or they feel inappropriate.
- Know in advance the direction of the story is taking.
- Review the story line prior to publication.
- Avoid a press conference atmosphere and speak only to one reporter at a time.

- Conduct a television interview using a silhouette or a newspaper interview without having your photograph taken.
- Give their side of the story related to the victimization.
- Refrain from answering reporters' questions during a trial.
- File a formal complaint against a reporter.
- Grieve in private.
- To be treated with dignity and respect by the media.



## Notes

## Notes

## Notes



# Resource Pages

## Joint Information Telephone Numbers

EOC phone number:

JIC manager phone number:

Public telephone team number:

Media telephone team number:

## Emergency Contacts

Name:

Telephone:

Fax:

E-mail:

Name:

Telephone:

Fax:

E-mail:

Name:

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Operated by Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education, the Emergency Management Laboratory has been training people to respond to emergencies for more than a decade. From radiation release and hazardous materials spills to fires and school violence, the EML can prepare you to respond to all types of emergency situations.

EML personnel bring 54 years combined experience in working with government and commercial clients, EML offers the technical expertise of major research universities, scientists and engineers and a nationwide network of emergency response experts to help you meet your training needs.

Customers include the U.S. Department of Energy, the U.S. Department of Defense, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency as well as corporations like Mobil Oil, Allied Signal Corporation, and Northeast Utility.

The EML can customize a course for your organization in the following subject areas:

- Spokesperson training
- Crisis and risk communication
- Advanced Joint Information Center Operations
- Developing emergency plans and procedures
- Enhancing school safety through emergency preparedness
- Designing and conducting emergency drills and exercises

For more information, visit our Web site at [www.ornl.gov/eml](http://www.ornl.gov/eml) or call us at (865) 576-6266

Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education  
Emergency Management Laboratory  
P.O. Box 117  
Oak Ridge, TN 37831-0117  
(865) 576-6266 • (865) 576-4872  
[www.ornl.gov/eml](http://www.ornl.gov/eml)

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