



Getting Your Story Told: Public Information Campaigns for Local Fire Safe Councils

Special thanks to State Farm Insurance for their generous sponsorship of this workshop series.



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Are you struggling to get more involvement from your community? Trying to figure out how to get your county supervisor as excited as you are about your programs? While you could stop everyone you meet on the street and tell them person-to-person how great your organization is, launching a public information campaign will help you work “smarter, not harder.”

Using the tools described within, your group can:

- Make an information plan
- Make friends with the people who can help your group
- Create new and interesting ways to get the word out
- Increase the chances that your audience is listening

What Public Information IS:

Public information campaigns are about getting attention. Your message is important! You want an audience that is really paying attention to what you’re saying. Making an information plan and doing targeted outreach are the key steps to getting your audience’s attention.

What Public Information is NOT:

Unfortunately, creating a public information campaign does not guarantee that you’ll get free publicity. In addition, if your story does get picked up, what you see on the evening news may barely resemble the press event that you so carefully orchestrated. If you are a “control freak,” then what you want is paid advertising.

Developing Your Information Campaign Plan

Step 1: Create Your Public Information Team

The smaller the better in this particular instance. In order to respond to press inquiries quickly, the Public Information Team must be able to make decisions quickly. The more people who must approve a press release before it can go out, the longer you'll be keeping a reporter on a deadline waiting!

Step 2: Define your objectives.

Each time you have a message, ask yourself these questions:

- What challenge faces your community that requires action?
- What *specifically* do you hope your Council will accomplish?
- What are you hoping to communicate? Don't pack too many messages into each message. Use "teaser topics" get attention, then tell the audience where to find more information (i.e. your website).
- Who are you talking to? (Chipping program "customers?" Potential donors?)
- What is the best way to reach the audience for *this* objective?

Use the worksheet on page 4 to help you draw up your campaign plan.

Step 3: Choose an Editor

Writing by committee is a sure way to make your piece less interesting. The team can brainstorm together on an outline, but once the ink hits the paper, be sure the "voice" isn't crowded out. Ask your partners (local, state or federal fire agencies, insurance companies, Resource Conservation Districts) if you can borrow their professional PR person.

Step 4: Make Friends!

Make contacts with your targeted outlets (media, elected representatives, and other partners). Keep your list updated by checking in at least annually.

Some sources for contacts:

- Media lists: www.newslink.org
- California elected representatives: www.leginfo.ca.gov
- Local government: www.ca.gov/About/Government/Local.html
- Water districts: www.lib.berkeley.edu/WRCA/district.html
- Utilities: www.energy.ca.gov/electricity/utilities.html

Information Campaign Plan Worksheet

Challenge/Event:

--

Specific Objectives:

- 1
- 2
- 3

--

Message:

--

Audience:

--

Recommendations:

- 1
- 2
- 3

--

Action Items:

Who	What	By When

What Makes it News?

In order to answer this question *for your audience*, you need to read the section of the paper that would cover your story, watch the news program you hope comes to your event, or listen to the radio program you think your audience is listening to. What are the producers of your chosen outlet giving to their public? In order to sustain their advertising dollars, they have to give the people what they want. Do some research to see what your outlet thinks is important.

Newsworthy stories generally:

- Appeal to the audience’s concern about their home, family, or possessions
- Have an element of drama
- Use humor or are entertaining
- Are new, different, or creative
- Relate to a larger, hot news story (a fire nearby)
- Have a human-interest angle



Tip from a pro: Know what else is happening in the “news cycle.” Try to schedule *around* big news days like Superbowl Sunday or Election Day.

The “Idea Matrix” Worksheet

Use a scale of 1 through 3, to evaluate your ideas for public information products against one another. Use your resources (and volunteers) wisely!

	Idea #1:	Idea #2	Idea #3
Which idea is most likely to meet the objective?			
How achievable is this idea based on available resources?			
Which idea can be done immediately?			
How “out of the ordinary” is this idea?			
Which idea is most demonstrable (show don’t tell)?			
Total points:			

News Release 101

The Basics:

Remember that every news release must answer:

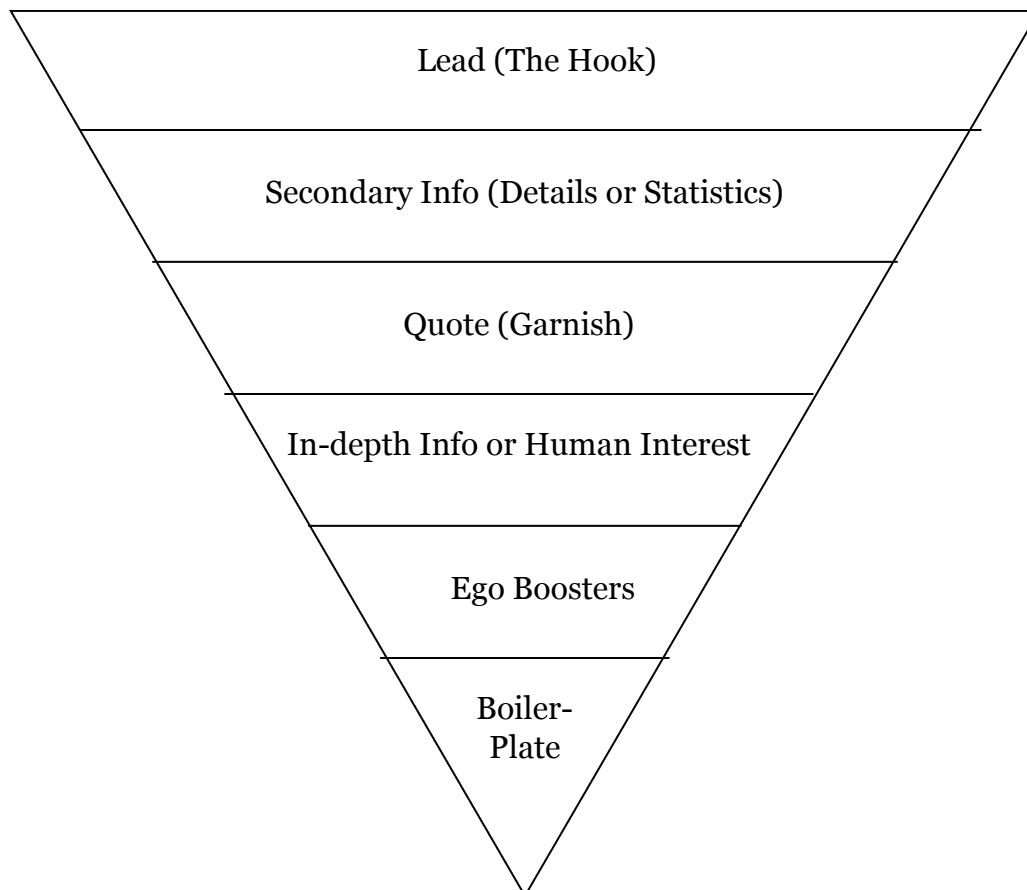
- Who?
- What?
- Where?
- When?
- Why?
- How?

Also remember to include:

- Who to contact for more information
- High quality photos in the format accepted by your outlet
- Where to learn more (your website)

Journalism 101:

The graphic below illustrates how to organize information in a news release. The reporter or editor who picks up your release may spend only a few seconds determining if your story is newsworthy. Convince them early that your story is valuable news, and they'll read to the end!



News Release 101

News Release Template:



_____ Fire Safe Council

Address _____

Phone _____

Fax _____

www. _____ .org

For Immediate Release OR For Release (Date)

Contact: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Headline

(location), CA (current date)..._News or Feature

Lead:

(Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?)

Body:

(more details)

About _____ FSC:

For more information about _____,

contact: _____

at (_____) _____

###

The **header** includes the source (your FSC) and contact info for this story. Also add a release date, either "For Immediate Release" or "For release: October 26, 2008"

Your **headline** should grab your readers' attention

News leads answer the questions at left in one paragraph so that if the rest of the story is edited out, the important facts will be left intact.

Feature leads must be engaging. Be dramatic, clever, or startling to keep your audience reading.

In the **body**, follow these rules:

- Be concise
- Put opinions/interpretations in quotation marks attributed to a source.
- Don't split paragraphs between pages (some editors work with scissors!)

Add a **boilerplate** paragraph about your group so that new editors and readers can get to know you.

Finish your release with **response information** for this particular story.

Let your editors know they've reached the end by typing "END" or "###" or even "-30-"

News Release 101: Tools for Success

Media Kits:

A **media kit** gathers the background information a reporter will need to write about your group. It should be complete enough that it tells the whole story. Keep media kit materials electronically in case you get an e-mail request. Include:

- News release
- Fact sheet on the issue at hand
- Fact sheet on your group
- Maps or other visual aids
- Business card of appropriate contact
- Copies of articles written about your group (These are copyrighted property of the publisher—get permission first!)

How to Send a News Release:

There is no one preferred way to send a news release. It is up to you to find out from your proposed outlets how *they* prefer to receive news. Keep careful notes on how each of your contacts receives information (postal mail, fax, or e-mail). If you e-mail, *never* send your release as an attachment, cut and paste it into your e-mail message.



News Release Checklist:

- ✓ Does the headline make you want to read the rest of the page?
- ✓ Is the text in the appropriate format for the outlet?
- ✓ Has the document been proofread by at least two people?
- ✓ Did you include the release date?
- ✓ Did you include your website address?
- ✓ Did you list the person who knows the most about the project as contact?
- ✓ Is the contact person readily available to answer questions?
- ✓ Who will be interviewed if asked?
- ✓ Can that person be available seven days a week?
- ✓ Did you include e-mail addresses?
- ✓ If you are including additional background, is it written in the same 'voice' *and* have you checked to ensure there are no information conflicts?

Success Story: One Council's News Release

The Fire Safe Council of Siskiyou County sent this news release to six area newspapers, three radio stations and the local television station.



PRESS RELEASE-May 1, 2008

Free Firesafe Money (or Rebate for Defensible Space)

Already wildfires have been running across California landscapes. We in Siskiyou County need to be prepared or at least preparing our homes and perimeters **NOW** for the upcoming fire season. Most citizens already know that it's the law to have properties fuel reduced, minimally within 100 foot of houses and outbuildings. What they may not know is there is help available. The Siskiyou Resource Conservation District along with the Fire Safe Council of Siskiyou County is offering a one time rebate up to \$400 for completed 100 foot defensible space projects. These monies are for Siskiyou County properties only and for families with incomes starting at \$25,500 for 1 person and graduating to \$51,600 for a family of 4 and beyond for larger families.

Kathleen and H Lopez and many others like them recognize the importance of being fire ready. The Lopez's used their rebate money to complete the defensible space around their home and barn. Without a doubt if fire moves near or through their land they will be prepared. The Lopez's are also helping to keep our fire fighting men and women more safe by providing an acceptable fire fighting environment and an easily accessible property. The Siskiyou RCD and the Fire Safe Council of Siskiyou County invite you to join the Lopez's and others in helping to keep our communities safer and more beautiful.

For more information on the "Defensible Space Rebate Program" please go to <www.firesafesiskiyou.org> or call Giselle Nova at 926-2089

Success Story: The Results

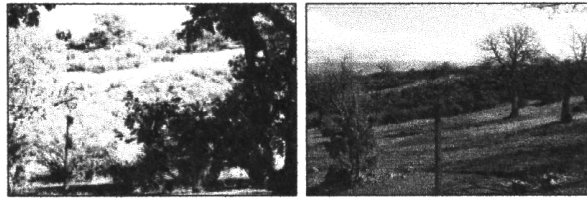
SISKIYOU DAILY NEWS

Siskiyou County's News Source Since 1859

Monday, May 5, 2008 Vol. 148 No. 88

Yreka, California

www.siskiyoudaily.com 47 cents plus tax



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

The photo at left shows the Lopez's property before fuel reduction. The photo at right shows the same property following fuel reduction work.

Money available for fuel reduction efforts

YREKA - Most citizens already know that it's the law to have properties' fuel reduced minimally within 100 foot of houses and outbuildings.

What they may not know is that there is help available. The Siskiyou Resource Conservation District, along with the Fire Safe Council of Siskiyou County, is offering a one-time rebate up to

\$400 for completed 100 foot defensible space projects. These monies are for Siskiyou County properties only and for families with incomes starting at \$25,500 for one person and graduating to \$61,600 for a family of four and beyond for larger families.

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The Lopez's used their rebate money to complete the defensible space around their home and barn. Without a doubt, if fire moves near or through their land they will be prepared. The Lopez's are also helping to keep firefighters safe by providing an acceptable fire fighting environment and an

See **REBATE**, page 3

Rebate

Continued from page 1

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community to join the Lopez's and others in helping to keep this community safer and more beautiful.

For more information

about the defensible space rebate program, visit the Fire Safe Council Web site, www.firesafesiskiyou.org, or call Giselle Nova at 926-2089.

In addition to this article, the other papers ran the news, the article's contact was interviewed on the radio and another radio station has scheduled an interview. The Council has even been promised an interview by the television station!

News Release 101

What Would You Do?



www._____.

Contact: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

For more information about _____,

_____ contact: _____

at (_____) _____

Media Alerts

A **media alert** is a one-page invitation that looks like a hybrid of a news release and a wedding invitation. Be sure to answer who, what, where, when, why, and how. Include times for photo opportunities & be sure you have representatives available!

The Fire Safe Council of San Diego County sent out the alert below and the release on the next page to publicize their annual volunteer awards ceremony:



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate use

CONTACT:

Christopher Blaylock, Public Outreach
(619) 562-0096
media@firesafesdcounty.org

SAVE THE DATE

Awards Ceremony to Recognize Volunteer Fire Safe Councils

San Diego: June 26, 2008 — Members of the press are invited to the Fire Safe Council of San Diego County Volunteer Awards Ceremony and Luncheon.

Who: Fire Safe Council of San Diego County
What: Volunteer Awards Ceremony and Luncheon
Where: Barona Resort & Casino
When: June 5, 2008 - Noon
Why: To honor volunteers who have given exceptional service to their community in the area of wildfire prevention
Awards: Fire Safe Council of the Year Award
Fire Safe Council Volunteer of the Year Award

Sixty-eight community Fire Safe Councils in San Diego are entirely run by volunteers. These volunteers work tirelessly to utilize grants from the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to protect their communities from wildfire. The aforementioned agencies as well as guest speakers will be in attendance.

We will send a full announcement shortly. Please contact us with any questions.

San Diego County boasts 73 community Fire Safe Councils – more than any other county in California. They are assisted by the Fire Safe Council of San Diego County, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. The Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County administers all fire safe programs in partnership with the Fire Safe Council of San Diego County. Fire Safe Council programs include educational support and training for community Fire Safe Councils and a chipping program for vegetation reduction in targeted areas. These programs and others are funded by National Fire Plan grants from the Bureau of Land Management and the USDA Forest Service and through grants provided by the California State Fire Safe Council.

WEBSITE: <http://www.firesafesdcounty.org>

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Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County
332 South Juniper Street, Suite 110 * Escondido, CA 92025
Phone: 760-745-2061 * Fax: 760-745-3210 * Website: www.rcdsandiego.org

Media Alerts

The Fire Safe Council of San Diego County followed up their alert with this release:



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate use

CONTACT: Christopher Blaylock, Public Outreach
(619) 562-0096
media@firesafesdcounty.org

Local, State and Federal Agencies Laud Community Wildfire Prevention Efforts Awards Ceremony to Recognize Volunteer Fire Safe Councils

San Diego: June 2, 2008 — On June 5, 2008, community Fire Safe Councils will be honored for exceptional service to their community in the area of wildfire prevention in San Diego County at a special Awards Ceremony and Luncheon at Barona Resort and Casino. The luncheon will begin at 12 p.m. and the awards ceremony will begin promptly at 12:30 p.m. Keynote speakers will include representatives from the Fire Safe Council of San Diego County and Assemblyman Joel Anderson, State Assembly 77th District. Representatives from U.S. Forest Service, CAL FIRE, the Bureau of Land Management and others will be in attendance. Members of the press are invited to conduct interviews following the awards ceremony.

Community Fire Safe Councils (FSCs) and the volunteers who run them are considered key partners by local, state and federal fire agencies. Clay Howe, Bureau of Land Management Fire Mitigation Battalion Chief says, "Community Fire Safe Councils are a vital piece of the wildfire equation. They provide the link between federal, state and local agency efforts and local community wildfire prevention needs. Without community Fire Safe Councils, much of the actual on-the-ground work done in local communities would not be possible."

Over three million federal and state dollars have recently been allocated to Fire Safe Councils to manage fuels in and around San Diego communities this year. Run entirely by volunteers, the Fire Safe Councils work closely with agency representatives to identify risks and carry out projects to address those risks. Fire officials feel confident in awarding these grants knowing a comprehensive plan is in place. According to Marty Leavitt, President of the Fire Safe Council of San Diego County, statistics tracked since the aftermath of the Cedar fire have proven that defensible space reduction in flammable fuels has successfully protected many homes and properties throughout the county and made the work of fire responders much easier by helping reduce flame lengths and overall fire fuels.

Tom Lamb of Jamul recently spearheaded the formation of the Outer Jamul FSC. Said Lamb, "Even before the Harris Fire, we looked around and saw how dry the conditions were and how dangerous our access roads might be during a fire. I felt like our community needed a plan. I heard about the Fire Safe Councils and saw a way forward."

Awards will be given for Outstanding Fire Safe Council of the Year and Fire Safe Council Volunteer of the Year. In addition, other volunteers will be honored by the Fire Safe Council of San Diego County and partner agencies for their outstanding contributions in protecting communities from wildfire.

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Media Alerts

The San Diego Union Tribune combined the media alert and news release from Fire Safe Council of San Diego with information from other local councils.

The San Diego Union-Tribune

[SAVE THIS](#) [EMAIL THIS](#) [PRINT THIS](#) [MOST POPULAR](#)

Fire-safe councils multiply in county

Volunteer panels promote education

By Alan Schnepf

June 7, 2008

There's nothing like living in the wake of a catastrophic firestorm to get people interested in fire-safe councils.

The 2007 wildfires have turned out to be no exception, boosting the number of fire-safe councils in San Diego County to 74, more than any county in the state. And a new one started two weeks ago in East County.

San Diego County's councils now represent about 40 percent of the total statewide, said Chris Blaylock, public outreach consultant for the Fire Safe Council of San Diego County, a support organization for all of the councils in the county. The Jamul, Lakeside and Pine Valley areas, among others, all have emerging fire-safe councils.

"Every time there's a big fire, they come out of the woodwork. Fire's a great motivator," said Marty Leavitt, president of the Fire Safe Council of San Diego County.

The all-volunteer councils promote education to help people make their homes more likely to survive wildfires, but each covers a specific area and different councils have different priorities.

The newest council was formed by the Rancho San Diego-Jamul Chamber of Commerce and announced May 23. Chamber President Valerie Harrison said the wildfires approached the area in 2007, but switched direction with shifting winds.

"If that hadn't happened, we don't know where we'd be today," Harrison said.

Harrison takes a "not if, but when" view of whether the communities will be scorched

Wildfire Prevention Effort Awards

On Thursday, local volunteers were recognized for wildfire prevention

Media Alerts

What Would You Do?



www. _____

Contact: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Writing a Feature Article

Good Ideas:

There are plenty of fire safe topics that warrant a full length article:

- **How-to:** clearing defensible space, landscaping, boxing eaves...
- **Case histories:** feature a family who created a defensible home...
- **New products:** flame resistant gel, roof vents, fire resistant siding...
- **Before and after projects:** fire safe gardens, demonstration homes...

Bad Ideas:

Don't make these rookie mistakes:

- **Submitting an article uninvited.** Write a query letter to find out if your outlet is interested!
- **Addressing your potential editor as "Sir/Madam."** Find out the person's name and use it!
- **Writing your article on a napkin.** These days your piece must be in Microsoft Word or a similar computer format.
- **Bribery:** Never offer to purchase advertising in exchange for an article.
- **Cookie-cutter approach:** Be very familiar with the outlet and their style.



Your local library's *current* copy of Writer's Market is a great place to look for magazine editor contact information!

You can also telephone your local newspaper editor.

The Pitch:

You know who might publish your article, now ask them. Here are the rules:

- **Write a high quality letter:** Typos in your letter could get you a rejection!
- **Use the first paragraph (or two) of your article in your letter:** If the editor keeps reading, you could be in!
- **Make your story clear:** Make sure you communicate your topic, your approach, an outline and your sources.
- **Dazzle them with facts and (good quality) photos:** The editor will know you know your stuff!

Once You Get Published:

Don't rest on your laurels! If you are fortunate enough to publish a feature article, write a thank you letter to the editor. In that letter, pitch your *next* fabulous idea that you think your editor might find interesting.

Letters to the Editor

Why:

If you can comment on a story that ran in the newspaper within 48 hours, while communicating important news about your Council, this is a great way to get your message out. After the front page and the sports section, the opinion page is the most read page of the paper.

How:

1. Hurry! If you don't submit your letter within 48 hours, your chances of getting published diminish significantly.
2. Limit yourself to your most important 200 words. Be concise, but from the heart. Think of it like writing an e-mail to a friend who asked your opinion about a particular article.
3. Reference the story in the paper by its headline and byline (i.e. "Early Start to Fire Season Worries Governor" by Bill Smith (June 11))
4. Submit your letter exactly in the format and by the method your paper prefers. Be sure to include your name, title, and organization name. You should also include your address, phone number, and e-mail address so that the paper can contact you.
5. Once you've submitted your letter, follow up with a phone call.

Successful Strategies:

- Familiarize yourself with what kind of letters get printed in your paper, and plan to follow suit when you send in yours.
- Monitor local papers and share articles that your group can comment on.
- Organize a "strike team" of quick, concise writers to shower the paper with letters whenever a story offers your group an opportunity to speak up. If several people write in about a past story, it's more likely the paper will be to run one of their letters. Use this strategy in moderation: if a paper gets "flooded" they won't print any of the letters.

Radio

You don't have to be a celebrity to be a guest on a radio show. Call your local radio station and speak to the producer. At smaller stations, the hosts are often their own producers. University radio stations are a great place to get started.

- Be familiar with the program you're trying to pitch to. A producer is more likely to book a regular listener.
- Prepare for the call by outlining why you would be a great guest on the show.
- Offer to send a media kit complete with clippings of articles featuring your group. Include a hand-written thank you for taking your call.
- Remember that media folk are busy. Follow up with a phone call, then a note.

According to the Northern California Broadcasters Association, radio reaches over 93% of the population at least once a week.

Prepare for the Air:

- Know your host's name and style of interviewing.
- Ask the station's advertising department for a media kit so that you can review your audience's demographics (age, income, family and economic status).
- Make a list of all the questions that you might be asked, *and the answers*.
- Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse!
- If it is a call-in show, ask a few friends to stand by with prepped questions. If no one is calling in, they can break the ice for the audience.
- Bring notes to combat stage fright.
- The show must go on: **don't be late!**

Be ready with a sound bite: define what you do in a single brief sentence.

Public Service Announcements:

Rules for getting your Public Service Announcement (PSA) on the air vary, so contact your local radio station. Because this is a free service, stations cannot guarantee when, how often, or for what duration your PSA will air. Although paid advertising always takes priority and your announcement is not likely to run during prime time, many listeners will still hear it. Use this outlet to advertise events!

Television Tips

The most boring thing on television is a “talking head” (an interview). Imagine you are watching television with the sound turned off. Because television is a visual medium, you must think visually. If your group is doing something engaging (chipping, clearing a fuelbreak, doing a controlled burn) you’ll be more likely to get air time.

How:

- **Watch television:** As with other media, you must be familiar with your outlet.
- **Watch for “evergreens:”** These are annual segments (how to make Thanksgiving dinner in November, injuries due to fireworks in July). Suggest your group become the Wildfire Awareness Week segment this year, and you might get invited every year!
- **Prepare a media kit and mail it to the show’s producer.**
- **Follow up:** Call the producer and ask if he/she is interested in running the story. If not, why not? By politely accepting critique, you’ll be better equipped to pitch your next story.



If you have the technical ability—or a corporate partner who does—create professional grade **B-roll** (video footage) of your event and give it *immediately* to your local news’ producer. Home video need not apply.

How to Interview

- Prepare! Make lists of talking points, questions that might be asked (& answers).
- Know your host’s name and style of interviewing, and prepare accordingly.
- Ask your interviewer, “Where would you like this interview to go?”
- Redirect: If your interviewer asks a “dumb” question, redirect with the information they probably really wanted.
- Focus on your interviewer, don’t think about the audience.
- Answer questions succinctly so that your words don’t end up on the cutting room floor.
- Give your editor choices: make your point repeatedly in a variety of ways.
- Be sincere and sympathetic!
- In front of television cameras, use gestures (sparingly) to keep viewers interested.
- Remember: they’re talking to you because you know this subject.
- If you get a tough question, above all else, stay calm. If it is an unfair or leading question, redirect with your message.

Media Tips

- Conviction and enthusiasm are contagious. When people see and hear how committed you are, they will want to hear what you have to say.
- Never assume you can interview off the top of your head. Take time to prepare competent and concise remarks prior to any contact with the media.
- Don't assume anyone has researched your group.
- Local media is always looking for a local angle to a national story.
- Send a **Media Alert** out a few days before an event to grab the attention of and help your proposed outlet plan ahead. A sample media alert is on page 20.
- Before sending your news release out, ask your proofreader, "What do you *perceive* this to say?" Make sure you are saying what you think you are!
- During an interview, if you are asked a question you don't know the answer to, say "I don't know, but I will find out and get back to you." Then *find out and get back to your interviewer* as soon as possible.



Tip from a pro: if you have a great working relationship with one of your partner agencies, write what you would like to publish as a quote from one representative, then e-mail it to them for approval. This is a good way to get them to say exactly what you need for your release!

What To Do If No One Shows Up:

- Don't be discouraged.
- E-mail your news release and photos—you could get published after all.
- Call your local reporter and follow up. Ask if they received your news release.
- Invite producers and editors to call you at the last minute if they run into problems, their guests cancel, or their features fall apart.



The Internet

Internet Articles

Follow the same rules to get feature articles onto internet sites or e-mail newsletters. Look in search directories (www.ezinearticles.com) for publications that might be appropriate. Send a personal e-mail along with your article asking the editor to consider it.

Word of Mouse:

Know all those e-mails you get that are forwarded ten thousand times? Use “viral marketing” to encourage your audience to forward your fire safety message to 10 or 100 people. These messages can be mistaken for spam, so be sure the “From” and “Subject” lines are recognizable.

Websites:

There are plenty of website-building tools on the internet to help you get started (www.godaddy.com, www.go1and1.com). You might want to have a teenager on hand for technical assistance.

Pointers to make your site useable by your constituency:

- Make your site easy to navigate and **easy to read!**
- Avoid using fancy graphics that take too long to download on slow connections.
- Learn about ADA requirements for websites: photo labels, color contrast, etc.
- Include your group’s history, archives of meeting minutes and articles, financial information as well as your latest news and announcements.
- Keep it updated!



Encourage your local government, chamber of commerce, and fire agency to put a link to your website on theirs to increase your traffic!

Other Web Tools:

As long as you have to volunteer-force to keep up on them, take advantage of the many ways the internet can help get your message out. Blogs, listservs, user groups and chat rooms are all tools of the trade.

Check out <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/FireSafeCouncilNetwork/>

Public Speaking

There are plenty of groups in the average community who are searching for speakers. Chambers of commerce, service groups (Kiwanis, etc), and church groups and homeowners associations may all welcome your public safety message.

Outlining Your Talk

Be sure to create an outline to avoid rambling. Your outline could be as simple as:

1. Introduction: an overview of the message
2. Body: present the facts, in detail
3. Conclusion: sum it up for the listener, encourage action

Unlike in written pieces, listeners can't flip back in order to review. Find creative ways to repeat your main points three times to promote retention by your listeners.

Don't overwhelm your audience with too much information. Give listeners a way to find out more later (your website) .

The Art of Talking

- Begin in a way that will engage your audience and make them feel invested in your talk. Asking questions gives you a chance to gauge your listeners' expertise, allowing you to tailor your comments depending on their knowledge of their subject.
- Make sure the body of your presentation covers what you promised in your introduction. Use human brief interest stories to reinforce your facts.
- Consider yourself to be having a conversation, and make eye contact with as many people in the room as possible.
- Prepare strong closing remarks so that your talk doesn't trail off with, "Well, I guess that's it. Thanks for listening."



If your talk is a how-to presentation, handing out written notes will ensure your listeners go home with practical ideas and instructions.

To PowerPoint or Not To PowerPoint

If your talk is supported by many graphic images (before and after photos, for example) a PowerPoint presentation is appropriate. If not, consider going low tech to draw your audience into your *personality* as opposed to your technology. If you do chose to use PowerPoint *never* crowd the slides with text that you read. Ugh!

Taking it to the Street

Nothing is more convincing than speaking one-on-one to a person. Although this is the most time consuming method of implementing a public information campaign, it is the cheapest. All you need are volunteers with walking shoes!

Where?

- Create a booth at a public safety fair, a community day in your grocery store parking lot, or at a summer concert in the park.
- Go door-to-door to distribute materials or offer to do home safety inspections. If no one is home, leave materials with your group's contact information behind.



Hold a fundraising car wash and assign one volunteer to speak to the folks in line. Touch on automobile safety during a wildfire.

Success Story: One Council's Campaign

Talmadge Fire Safe Council created a handbook for each volunteer who would be canvassing the neighborhood. Each area "coordinator" takes responsibility for an area near home, where the neighbors would know him/her. Then the coordinator knocks on doors and shares information about fire safety.

Talmadge's Handbook gives the coordinators the tools they need to be successful speakers for the Fire Safe Council:

- Frequently asked questions
- Goals of the Fire Safe Council
- Points for the coordinator to remember
- Thoughts to share
- A summary of the Community Wildfire Protection Plan
- General recommendations for fuel treatment
- Drawings that illustrate how-to thin and limb up a shrub
- Before and after examples
- Maps and aerial photographs
- A resource list

How to Talk to Your Elected Representatives

Educating your elected representatives about what your council is doing can accomplish two important things. First of all, they might be able to secure funding or other resources for one of your projects. Secondly, where elected representatives go, there too goes the media. Remember they are there to help you, so let them!

How:

- Make an appointment!
- Let them know you are a constituent and be clear why you are contacting them.
- Be professional and concise. Always be honest.
- Give them informational materials that are pertinent to your conversation.
- Thank them for work they have done that benefitted your group.
- Let them know there are more constituents, government leaders, or key interest groups that share your views. Never exaggerate the support for your issue.
- Be a credible source of information they can call as a resource in the future.
- Offer to arrange and conduct a tour of your project.
- *Never* mix campaign contributions and your issue.
- When asked a question, answer it briefly, but be sure you've answered it. If the question requires research, say so, and be sure to get back to them.
- Follow up with a thank you note that restates your position.

Appreciate the staff! They can do a great deal on your behalf.

Keep in Touch:

Just like with newspaper editors, find out how your elected representatives and/or their staffers prefer to hear from you, then keep them up-to-date on projects and events. Also let them when you need their help.

Stakeholders Who Might Tell Your Story

Take a look around your community to see who you haven't asked for help yet. Chances are, you have plenty of potential partners who can help get the word out.

Water Districts

Ask your water district if they can insert information about your next chipping day in with the water bill!

Electric Companies

Your electric company may have a fire safety advisor who can speak at your events. This person could distribute your information to other organizations he or she speaks to.

Banks

Local branches of banks are often able to display safety or community-building items. If you have a coloring contest, ask your bank to display the winning entries!

Small Businesses

Ask your local businesses, restaurants and storefronts to display fliers advertising your upcoming events. Your local barber can pass out information on chipper programs, your nursery can sell tickets to the garden tour that features your demonstration garden, your hardware store can offer a discount coupon for weed eater string inside the defensible space brochures they hand out.

Corporations and Tribes

In addition to being potential donors, corporations and tribes can post your message on their website, include it in their newsletter, or distribute your information to their contacts within your area. They can also link to your website. Ask them if they would like naming rights to your fuelbreak in exchange for a significant donation!

Clubs, Churches and Service Groups

These folks can be great banks of volunteers! Also, they may be willing to have you speak at one of their meetings, involve your group in a big event they are hosting, or distribute information in their regular newsletter.

Other Things to Consider

Cultural and Language Differences

Recognize that many of the individuals in your targeted audience may be of different cultures and may speak other languages. Ways that you can address these issues:

- Ask your stakeholders and partners if they have resources or staff who can translate or explain cultural differences to your group.
- When creating print materials, make some copies in the languages spoken in your community.
- Ask your local school district and/or school counselor for help being sensitive to the needs of your community. They may offer to send home information with the school kids!

Be careful to remain politically neutral!
No matter “which side you are on” on any given issue,
half of your audience will tune you out.



From PR For Dummies: Top 10 “NEVERs”

1. Never lie or mislead. Reporters tell colleagues about untrustworthy sources.
2. Never stonewall. “No comment” is the same as “I’m guilty” to a reporter.
3. Never procrastinate. Journalists have deadlines that are not flexible.
4. Never be inaccessible. Tomorrow will be another hot story, get yours out now.
5. Never offer a bribe. Don’t offer to purchase advertising in exchange for a story.
6. Never turn up your nose. A small outlet is still read or listened to by someone.
7. Never bore people. Your job is to create excitement around your message.
8. Never be a “no man.” Listen to your information team, and critique positively.
9. Never sacrifice long-term relationships for short-term results. Don’t strong arm.
10. Never behave unethically. Your group’s reputation is its most important asset.

Did It Work?

Once you've implemented your plan, an important final step is to review how well it accomplished the objectives you initially set for your group. Revisit your initial plan use the worksheet below to measure your effectiveness:

What did you have planned?

What actually happened?

What worked well?

What could use improvement?

What will you do differently next time?

Resources

Some of the many resources available for those looking to implement public information campaigns (not to be construed as endorsement by CFSC or our sponsor) :

Publications:

- Guerrilla Publicity by Jay Conrad Levinson, Rick Frishman, and Jill Lublin
- “The Handbook of Independent Journalism” published by the US Department of State and available online at:
<http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/journalism/index.htm>
- Public Relations for Dummies by Eric Yaverbaum with Bob Bly and Ilise Benun
- Ask your professional partners to borrow their copy of Bacon’s Guide to California Media published by Cision

Useful Links:

Newspapers of the World: www.newslink.org

Southern California Regional Broadcasters Association: www.sbca.com

Northern California Regional Broadcasters Association: www.ncradio.com

Center for Media and Democracy: www.prwatch.org

Chambers of Commerce by County: www.calchamber.com

Website Hosting: www.1and1.com

Other Ideas:

- Take a journalism or Public Relations class at a community college.
- Continuing Ed programs often offer classes on press release writing.
- Ask a Public Relations major at a nearby college to volunteer with your group.

