



Coffee Break Training - Fire Prevention and Public Education

Making the Most of Teachable Moments

No. FM-2011-12 November 17, 2011

Learning Objective: The student shall be able to describe how to include fire safety and prevention messages in interviews with the media.

Public Information Officers (PIOs) play a major role in communicating fire safety and prevention information to the public after residential fires. To make the most of these teachable moments, it is important to know what to do and say before, during, and after an interview with the news media.

Before an Interview

1. Put fire safety and prevention messages in your own words so they seem natural to you.
2. Make note of fire safety- and prevention-related services the fire department offers (for example, home safety surveys, escape planning assistance, free smoke alarm installation programs, etc.).
3. Consider using local or national statistics to create powerful “sound bites”—short and easily remembered lines intended to be suitable for media repetition.
4. Practice saying your sound bites so you are comfortable with them.

During an Interview

1. **Keep safety and prevention messages closely linked to the current fire story;** the more tailored the message, the more likely it will capture the media’s attention.
2. **Mention safety and prevention tips and facts.** Remind people about how to prevent fires from occurring and what they can do to lessen or avoid injury during a fire.
3. **Mention smoke alarms and residential sprinklers.** Similar to news stories about motor vehicle crashes, which mention whether riders were wearing their seatbelts, encourage reporters to mention whether the home had working smoke alarms or residential sprinklers.
4. **Provide statistics.** Numbers that are meaningful to the viewer/reader can help them see just how serious the problem of residential fires is and compel them to take preventive action.
5. **Give a “call to action.”** Empower people to protect themselves by providing clear, concrete action steps.

After an Interview

1. Follow up with the reporter the day after the interview by phone or email. Ask if the reporter needs any additional information. Offer to provide safety and prevention tips that may be used as a sidebar.
2. If the story has already run, encourage a followup or feature story and offer to provide more safety and prevention tips or information about fire safety programs in the community.
3. Provide information from the fire investigation that was not available during the interview.
4. Offer to serve as a resource for future fire safety- and prevention-related stories.

For more information and resources to help you work with the media, visit the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) website at www.usfa.fema.gov/media



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For archived downloads, go to:

www.usfa.fema.gov/nfa/coffee-break/