

# ***Communicating Health & Safety Information Through the Mass Media***

Presented by:

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# Objectives

- Explain why it is important for safety & health professionals to be able to effectively interact with the media –especially in the post 9/11 world
- Describe the various media outlets and their unique characteristics
- Provide a list of media “do’s” and “don’ts”
- Show some “real world” examples – and let you judge if the message got through



# Why Train Safety & Health “Experts” in Media Relations?

- In our current environment, the need for prompt, accurate public health information is ACUTE
- Lots of media outlets exist, so the use of guest “bloviators” (“talking heads who can discourse at length in an authoritative manner on nothing” ) is mandatory
- Duty to drive out bad information with good
- The ability to appropriately handle media interactions is key to success



# Primary Mass Media Formats

- Ranked in order of popularity as reported by consumers of “nonspecific content”
  - Television
  - Internet/Web
  - Radio (drivetime, especially)
  - Newspapers, periodicals
- Each medium has communication problems unique to its mode of absorption



# Consider the Time Dimension

- Where were you on 9/11? And where did you go for instant information?
  - TV, web, radio – almost instantly
  - Newspaper – next day
  - Magazine – new week or month
  - Scientific Journal – next year
  - History books – following years

# How Do Texans Get Information About “Higher Education?”

- Public opinion survey by Montgomery & Associates for the UT Foundation, Spring 2003—

15 %	Newspapers	28 %	Other people
14 %	Internet	13 %	Personal experience
7.5 %	Television	7 %	Direct from universities
5 %	“Somewhere”	7 %	Other
0.5 %	Radio	3 %	Unresponsive



# What is Your GOAL?

- Effective public health messaging should make people safe and make people feel safe.
- Do the first, *then* the second.

# What is Your MESSAGE?

- Tell how people (everyone!) can help in the emergency.
- Knowing is better than not knowing
- “We work for YOU”





# The Power of the Media

- Instantaneous in delivery
- 24/7 in frequency
- Global in breadth
- Fiercely competitive in action
- Voracious in its appetite for “content”
- Deficient in memory

# So, where *does* “news” come from?

- Breaking news – “*Something just happened ...*”  
SARS, Mad Cow Disease, CDC report, Celebrity death
- Trending news – “*This always happens ...*”  
Flu season, Fattest City, MS 150, Diabetes Month
- Herding news – “*Somebody else just reported this ...*”  
CNN crawler, AP wire, Matt Drudge, WebMD
- “Pitched” news – “*This looks interesting ...*”  
Embargoed publication, news release, media advisory,  
press conference, phone teaser, blast e-mail

Editors want to see:

## **“Big” Stories Brought HOME**

- Want “content” from “local experts” about safety/public health issues
- Shock value is instant, hard facts come slowly
- Worst thing you can do is to say NOTHING
- One-third of managing a media disaster is ACCURATE, TIMELY MESSAGING



# What Spurs Media Interest in YOU?

- Proactive – story “pitches”
  - Public health example – Homeland Defense
- Reactive – breaking news
  - Public health example – Space Shuttle Columbia
- Cooperative – news on assignment
  - Public health example – “Disease of the Week”

# Formal Press Releases or Media Announcements

- An strategic attempt to get media interest
- Positive media coverage can equal millions in advertising—one column inch in the *NY Times* or just 30 sec. on TV = \$900 if paid for)
- What to include:
  - Just the facts; who/what/where/why
  - Less is more, a lot less is a lot more
  - Include basic contact information

# TV People are “Different”

- Hate to be second
- Will put it on TV with or without you
- “Data smog” kills them
- Probably will only say it one time
- Absolutely must K-I-S-S
- Think in pictures not numbers
- Need you “*up!*”

# PICTURES Tell the Story for TV

- Information: deliver it as a bumper sticker
- Props: devices, tools, demonstrations
- “Average” people: patients, victims, helpers
- Backdrop: good light, movement, colors
- “B” Roll: pre-filmed footage

# Timeliness is Everything

- There is no “tomorrow” for the news media.
- Prompt response is critical
  - Avoid academic “dream time”
  - Use good voice mail greeting
  - Wear a pager, turn on your cell phone
- Be a resource to “connect the dots”
- Develop a reputation for reliability—homework





# Public Affairs “Flaks”

- Many organizations have media relations policies and Public Affairs units
- May not be able to hide behind the “flak” – a “front” person can send the wrong message on screen
  - Consider a workplace accident with media interest – what is the company hiding?
- Prudent for safety & health professionals to be prepared if called upon



# Helpful Hints for Interviews

1. Know when to accept/refuse an interview
2. Anticipate difficult questions, prepare answers
3. If surprised, count to five
4. Be concise—stay “on message”
5. Be honest—the media will catch a lie
6. Admit you don’t know if you don’t
7. Don’t be argumentative or didactic



# For TV or Radio: Special interview tips

- Make a buddy of the videographer
- Ask what the first question will be
- Turn negative questions into  
**POSITIVE STATEMENTS**
- Talk in “sound bites”— K-I-S-S
- Be natural—the camera knows a phony
- Check to see if the mic is “Off”



# Media NEVER Dos

- Never ask to approve a reporter's story
- Never go "off the record"
- Never mention the reporter's boss
- Never say you'll call back unless you will
- Never say "I hate reporters" or "I never watch TV news" or "We don't take your paper"



# Media ALWAYS Dos

- Always ask for a pro's help if it's available
- Always ask yourself: what does my work mean for Uncle Buddy/Aunt Sue?
- Always offer “bullet points” in writing
- Always spell out your name
- Always clearly state your affiliation
- Always *sincerely* thank the reporter



# As a Consumer of Media Content

- Five keys questions you should always consider
  - Who created the message?
  - What techniques are used to attract your attention?
  - What lifestyles, values, and points of view are presented in or omitted from the message?
  - Why was the message sent?
  - How might different people understand the message differently from you?

*Adapted from: Jolls and Thoman, Center for Media Literacy, Santa Monica, CA*



# Generic Media Timeline

- Cold call or pitch
- Create “backgrounder” (always in a rush)
  - What are our take home points?
- Set up
- Interview
- Edit
- Run
  
- Let’s see what goes in, and what comes out



# Example #1

- Breaking news
  - Shuttle Columbia



# Example #2

- Pitched news
  - Preparing for emergencies at work and home

# Example #3

- Herding news
  - Original Wall Street Journal article on sanitation associated with microwave ovens