

Tool kit for Health/Communication Managers and Staff involved in daily communication activities

Resource: Guidelines to deal with media inquiries

The aim of these guidelines is to make available some possible responses to use during first contacts with media, immediately after a crisis situation occurs. By using these approaches, the health institutions, through their communication units, can tackle with more confidence and awareness media requests, avoiding to "be taken by surprise" or "caught unprepared". Examples are oriented to:

Objective:

- communicate the idea that the institution has an efficient organization, prepared to collaborate with the media, respecting their demands;
- make the media understand that this alliance, based on transparency and honesty, has precise rules, determined also by the limits that the crisis situation imposes.

Guidelines to deal with media inquiries

By phone to media:

- "We've just learned about the situation and are trying to get more complete information now. How can I reach you when I have more information?"
- "All our efforts are directed at bringing the situation under control, so I'm not going to speculate about the cause of the incident." How can I reach you when I have more information?"
- "I'm not the authority on this subject. Let me have (Mr. Name of the responsible person) call you right back."
- "We're preparing a statement on that now. Can I fax it to you in about two hours?"
- "You may check our web site for background information and I will fax/e-mail you with the time of our next update."

By person to media (if you are authorized to give out the following information)

This is an evolving emergency and I know that—just like we do—you want as much information as possible right now. I wish I could answer all of your questions here. While we work to get your questions answered as quickly as possible, I want to tell you what we can confirm right now:

- At approximately, _____ (time), a (brief description of what happened)
- At this point, we do not know the number of _____ (persons ill, persons exposed, injuries, deaths, etc.).
- We have a system (plan, procedure, operation) in place for just such an emergency.

The situation is (under) (not yet under) control and we are working with (local, State) authorities to (e.g., contain this situation, determine how this happened, determine what actions may be needed by individuals and the community to prevent this from happening again).

We will continue to gather information and release it to you as soon as possible. I will be back to you within _____ (amount of time, 2 hours or less) to give you an update. As soon as we have more confirmed information, it will be provided. We ask for your patience as we respond to this emergency.

For more information:

Spokesperson pocket guide tips

Be first. Be right. Be credible (1)

<p>Build Trust and Credibility</p>	<p>As a Spokesperson</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathy and caring • Competence and expertise • Honesty and openness • Commitment and dedication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know your organization’s policies • Stay within the scope of responsibilities • Tell the truth, be transparent • Embody your agency’s identity
<p>Top Tips</p>	<p>Prepare to Answer These Questions</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don’t over reassure • Acknowledge uncertainty • Express wishes (“I wish I had answers.”) • Acknowledge people’s fears, Give people things to do • Ask more of people (share risk) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are my family and I safe? • What can I do to protect myself and my family? • Who is in charge? • What can we expect? • Why did this happen? • Were you forewarned? • Why wasn’t this prevented? • What else can go wrong? • When did you begin working on this? • What does this information mean?
<p>Stay on message</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “What is important to remember is ...” • “I can’t answer that question, but I can tell you ...” • “I want to tell your viewers ...” • “Allow me to put this in perspective ...” 	

(1) Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention