

Definition and Analysis of Media

To develop an up-to-date media directory for your region, there are many sources available. Check the local Yellow Pages for general information on local newspapers and broadcasters. At your local library, you can ask for a media directory such as that published by *Editor and Publisher* magazine. Another publication, *California Metro Media*, covers all print and broadcast organizations in the state and includes specific contacts for subject categories. Once you have the names and contact information, call the newspapers, television and radio stations to make sure the information is current, especially the name of the producer or reporter/editor you have as a contact. Media people tend to move around frequently.



Newspapers

There were 98 daily newspapers and 593 weeklies in California in mid-1998. Dailies typically have larger circulations and more specialized staff reporters. For instance, reporters who cover only environmental issues might be found at the larger daily papers. Weeklies and smaller daily papers have smaller staffs. Reporters there tend to be generalists who cover a wide variety of issues. They may have little experience in environmental coverage. These smaller papers rely heavily on news releases and might print them verbatim from credible sources. Larger newspapers will view releases as ideas for stories but will investigate and write original copy before a story is run.

Deadlines

Deadlines depend on many factors, most importantly publishing cycle. Morning papers have deadlines starting late in the afternoon the day before publication. Only breaking news (usually sporting events) can be completed in the late evening and still make the morning run. Afternoon newspapers typically have early morning deadlines. Deadlines for weeklies depend on day of publication and printing press schedules.

Specialty sections within any paper (such as the gardening section) have various deadlines. However, the deadline is generally at least two days before publication. Call to check.

Coverage

Daily newspapers cover international, national, regional and local news, so you can tailor your press materials to interest the state, regional or local angle. Weekly newspapers are usually interested in regional or, more specifically, local news, so news releases should be very specific to local interest.

Placement

Decision-making varies depending on newspaper size. The larger dailies have subject-matter editors. Most key editors meet daily to share story ideas for feature pages.

To place a story in a newspaper, you should be familiar with the staff structure and how it applies to your story angle. If a story needs to reach gardeners and there is a gardening or outdoor editor at a paper, that is your best start. First send a letter or release that outlines the story ideas and specific facts. Then follow up by phone. However, DO NOT call just to ask if they received the letter or release. Follow up with a specific offer of an interview or other information not contained in the written communications. Explain the importance of the issue to their readership. This is part of grooming relationships with publications that will be of value in the future.

Category opportunities

Major dailies typically offer the following sections and opportunities. Some examples of appropriate story angles:

Garden section

You can approach the editor about an education campaign, especially if there is an event scheduled with a retailer. Make sure you let them know that this is a statewide “situation” with local programs that will impact the quality of life for everyone.

Lifestyle section

You can approach this editor about information that shows our changing lifestyle and our more environment-friendly habits. As part of this broader story, you can translate important information about the purchase, use and proper disposal of home pesticides.

Business section

If you have a retailer involved in a partnership program, you can invite the business editor to explore how businesses are doing more and more “community relations” activities with your program as a prime example.

Metro section

This is typically reserved for breaking news that affects the local region and is appropriate for news conferences or other important and timely stories that don't have the “shelf life” of the previous feature ideas.

Magazines

Many regional and special interest magazines are circulated to California audiences. Keep in mind, magazines don't have to be published in California to be of interest to California residents. Regional magazines include such titles as *Diablo Magazine* (Contra Costa County), *The East Bay Monthly* and *Los Angeles Magazine*. Local magazines and newsletters from community gardening clubs and nurseries offer excellent opportunities to place pesticide feature stories.

Special interest magazines that may cover specific educational efforts that protect California's environment include *California Flyfisher*, *California Game & Fish*, *California Landscaping*, *California Wild* and national publications such as *Gardening Life*, *Outdoors and Home*, *Lawn and Leisure*.

Deadlines

Magazines have long lead times for deadlines, usually needing materials at least a month, if not several months, before publication date. They are not for breaking news items, but can do great feature work in the environmental arena.

Placement

Due to their long lead time before publication, magazines are more feature-oriented and tend not to cover press conferences and events. However, you can call the editor of the most appropriate section (lifestyles, business and

outdoor are typical general magazine sections) to discuss an in-depth story. To have a positive outcome, position both the problem and the potential solutions of which you are a part. Again, start with a letter and follow-up by phone with a specific plan to give the editor a complete story. Maybe it's a tour of your facility and an example of your inspection process and what it means to public health and safety.

Category opportunities

Within the print publication industry, focus your efforts on special-interest magazines to reach the specific audience you want to reach. For instance:

Gardening

Knowing that readers of gardening magazines are more knowledgeable than others about the use of home pesticides, your story angles and materials can be more advanced and to the point.

Outdoor

Magazines that reach people who love the outdoors, especially water sports, will be interested to know that they might have an inadvertent hand in water pollution problems.

Regional publications

These magazine editors are always looking for topics within the region that make them stand out. You might want to tailor the materials to show how the community has progressed toward halting pollution in its lakes and streams.

Radio

There were 243 commercial AM stations and 346 commercial FM stations in California in mid-1998, many without their own news departments or news editors. News-talk stations are on the AM dial and FM stations tend to be music-oriented. Many of the larger FM stations also have news departments.

Deadlines and placement

Radio is an immediate medium. Even faster than television, radio will report on stories as they are happening. However, for a normal news cycle with a feature angle to it, you should consider approaching an assignment editor (the person who assigns reporters to cover news stories) or a specific reporter who has covered the subject area, about a week in advance of the interview or “event.” The first approach is in writing, and typically faxed as an “advisory.” Keep in mind that radio reporters will be more interested in stories that have key interview or sound opportunities.

After an advisory, you can start following up with phone calls and then complete the cycle by sending a media “alert” to them the day before an event or interview opportunity.



If you are placing a guest on a radio talk show, you should start “booking” the segment about three weeks in advance although you might not get confirmation until a few days out. Keep in mind that news talk shows are always looking for fresh subjects and those that originate locally offer an excellent opportunity to place a story.

Radio news prides itself on being able to deliver the news first. Send breaking news releases to assignment editors at the larger news stations or to reporters interested in the environment and community activities.

Television

In mid-1998, there were 86 commercial television stations, 20 public broadcasting stations, and another 115 cable systems in the state. The number of cable systems illustrates the incredible fragmentation of the media via cable and Internet players. Although fragmentation makes it more difficult to place advertising dollars with efficiency, it sometimes makes it easy to direct public relations efforts to a specific audience. For instance, if there are regional TV programs targeted to the California gardener, you can be sure this audience is interested in gardening and has at least a casual knowledge of pesticide use.

Most commercial television stations have a local news department. Many smaller community stations have local programming during the weekends that deal with specific interests and can be a target for a spokesperson or program announcement.

Deadlines and placement

Television news stations require time to edit video tape to put together a story for a later newscast. That can take anywhere from one to three hours, depending on the complexity of the story. This should be a factor in timing a press event or conference. Try to schedule it for mid-morning or mid-afternoon so reporters have time to prepare tape for noon newscasts or evening news.

In approaching the station, try the assignment editor for stories that will require a remote camera assignment.

Again, the first contact is in writing via fax. Then follow up with the editor via phone. The first communications should happen no more than two weeks in advance of the event or interview opportunity. Television operates on a short fuse. Assignment editors attend early morning editorial meetings, so try to reach them after 9 a.m. They typically have an afternoon assignment meeting as well, so be aware of their “busy hours.” If you are having trouble getting through to the assignment editor or have not received a positive response, shift your efforts to a likely reporter — one who has covered the subject matter and you know could be interested. Veteran reporters often submit their own story ideas.



The news department wants stories that affect the majority of their viewers and have a visual component. Unlike radio and newspapers, visual opportunities are a dominant factor in determining coverage. For instance, a press conference staged at the edge of a stream with large graphic examples of point source pollution and demonstrations of the “do’s and don’ts of home pesticide use” will receive greater attention than a press conference staged in a central office with a spokesperson trying to describe the problem and efforts towards a solution.

Explanation of Media Opportunities

Just as the various types of media are varied, the opportunities with each are broad. Depending on the “immediacy” of the news value — breaking news where a certain study is being unveiled that shows how residential pesticide use contributes to water pollution or an on-going educational effort to get

consumers to use home pesticides responsibly — different media contact opportunities are possible.

Keep in mind that the news media is interested in stories concerning controversy/conflict, change and human drama.

Print and Broadcast Story Opportunities

Breaking news	Immediate events, activities, and stories that are newsworthy.
Feature story	A story that reflects human nature, lifestyle, and current trends.
Investigative reports	An in-depth story that uncovers, chronicles and details a person, place or thing.
Personality/profile	An in-depth story about a person or organization that reflects its culture, personality, successes, failures.
Point/counterpoint	Interviews where two sides of an issue are discussed or debated. CNN’s Crossfire is an example of a point/counterpoint show.
Side bar	A shorter story that relates to a larger story and is usually positioned to the side of the larger story.
Editorial	A media outlet’s position on regional, state and national events, issues, trends.
Guest Editorial	A submission reflecting an organization’s position on local, state or national events and trends.
Community Calendar Listing	A listing of community events, shows, and public meetings occurring in a region.

Print Interview Formats

Telephone	Telephone interviews are most common. The spokesperson provides reporter with the sound bites and information needed to prepare a story.
Desk-side briefing	Involves a face-to-face meeting with a reporter, usually at the offices of the media outlet. Used frequently in media tours to demonstrate new products/offerings.
On-location	Interviews that occur when the media come to an organization's location/event to conduct one-on-one interviews and gather any visuals to enhance a story.
Editorial board	A face-to-face or telephone interview with an editorial writer(s) to gain the media outlet's support for an organization's position.
News conference	A news conference is called to make a major announcement or, in crisis cases, to provide answers to many press inquiries at one time.

Broadcast Interview Formats

Live or taped	An interview with a spokesperson(s) live at a scene or taped for airing at a later time.
Edited or unedited	An interview can be live or unedited, or taped and edited for airing at a specified time.
In-studio talk show or call-in show	These are live or taped interviews also where a spokesperson is able to voice a position on an issue/trend.
On-location stand-up	An interviews which happen at a site of a staged event, crisis or relevant subject area; they can be either taped or live.
Remote interview	Interviewer and spokesperson are in two completely different locations
Solo interview versus panel	A solo interview uses an expert to provide perspective or analysis for the story; a panel involves two or more experts.
News conference	A news conference can be called to make a major announcement or, in crisis cases, to provide answers to many press inquiries at one time.
Ambush interview:	A <i>60-Minutes-</i> or <i>Dateline-</i> style interview where an entire crew shows up to cover a story, generally with very little warning.

Media Tools

News release	This is a brief information sheet that tells the news story and is written in a news format. A news release must contain news or it won't get printed. It should also be well-written and free from typographical errors or other blunders. You can prepare a news release in the same form and style as a reporter working for a newspaper and should therefore become familiar with journalism style including punctuation and spelling rules. <i>An Associated Press Stylebook</i> is highly recommended (available at your local bookstore).
Media advisory	This is a summary of an upcoming event that you want the media to cover or to announce to its audience. See example on page 48.
News conference	A news conference can be called to make a major announcement or, in crisis cases, to provide answers to many press inquiries at one time. We recommend not utilizing this public relations vehicle unless absolutely necessary. These types of events can be very difficult to control. Reporters tend to not show up at press conferences unless it's for breaking news or a crisis. Press tours or other gatherings of journalists on a more casual, interactive basis are preferred. If you have to call a conference, you can do it by phone and media advisory. Have background materials ready for journalists on site and to deliver to those not able to attend.
Media tour	This combines the use of a spokesperson (third party or trained employee) who goes to the media outlet to provide an interview or appear as a guest on an appropriate program. The media tour starts with a story idea that is provided to the newspaper editor or broadcast assignment editor via a one-page letter, also known as a pitch letter, that captures immediate attention. This is followed by contact phone calls to schedule the appointments. The spokesperson should be trained to deliver the important messages in each and every interview opportunity.

Additional Tools to Explore

Public Service Announcements (PSA)	A PSA is a written or taped message that provides important information to the public and is absent of commercialism. A PSA to promote responsible pesticide handling would focus on very simple things that the public can do, and should clearly define why this action is needed. PSAs are typically delivered to the community relations or public affairs director of the media
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organization and are ready for direct reading, printing or playing. Getting a PSA aired or broadcast may take a number of phone calls and letters, but the end result will be worth the effort.

Press Kits

A press kit delivers many angles of a story. A comprehensive press kit for the source reduction outreach program could include the following:

- “Backgrounder” on the problem of pesticide residues in surface and ground water
- Summary of scientific resources or sources (e.g., books, universities, other organizations)
- News release on POTW efforts to reduce pesticide residues
- Biography of available spokesperson
- Information fact sheet on the operating statistics of the POTW
- Cover letter letting the reporter know how important the material is and asking for interview or other participation.

Letter to the editor

Letters to the editor appear in the editorial section of a newspaper. They are generally written by citizens with a point of view on current issues. You may wish to write a letter to the editor when an issue of concern to your district was the subject of a news story. You may wish to highlight aspects of the story you feel were underplayed, correct factual items that were in error, or present a point of view you feel was misrepresented. Keep letters under 250 words and relevant to current stories or editorials that have been covered in a newspaper. There will be instructions in the paper telling you how to submit a letter. If an electronic address is provided, that is typically the preferred method since it makes production easier.

Opinion editorial

Op-ed is short for “opinion editorial,” and refers to a page of special features usually placed opposite the editorial page of a newspaper. Different papers have different policies regarding op-eds. An op-ed is an opportunity to communicate the perspective of the POTW at greater length than a letter to the editor. Contact your newspaper and find out who handles op-ed pieces, and their length requirements. Submit your op-ed with a cover letter explaining the importance of this opinion being expressed. Personal follow-up to the submission is appropriate. Don’t expect to see anything for another four weeks for “normal” processing and editing unless it is a “hot” issue.

Guidelines for Writing Press Releases

If professional public relations counsel will not be used to write public communications materials, use these guidelines in drafting and distributing basic press materials and notifications.

Press Release Checklist

- Is the lead direct and to the point? Does it contain the most important and most interesting aspects of the story?
- Has the local angle been emphasized?
- Have who, what, when, where, why and how been answered?
- Are sentences short, concise? Paragraphs short? Words easily understood and to the point?
- Has editorial comment been placed in quotation marks and attributed to the appropriate person?
- Are quotations natural? Do they sound as though they could have been spoken?
- Has newspaper style (AP, for example) been followed faithfully throughout the release?
- Are spelling and punctuation correct?
- Have all statements of fact been double-checked for accuracy?
- Is the release dated and release time indicated?
- Are there contact persons and phone numbers if reporters want more information?

Press Release Guidelines

Write a news release from the perspective of a reporter writing for a paper. It should be written exactly the way you'd want it to appear.

- Identify the key message of the story and present it in the lead. The lead defines the purpose of the release.
 - The lead should clearly state what the story is about and why it's important.
 - The lead should be attention-grabbing and interesting for both the editor reviewing the release and the reader. Identify a local angle.
 - The lead should be no more than two or three sentences in length. Use the body of the release to explain the details.
- Write in news style, short and simple. Write concise sentences, short paragraphs, and use easily understood and specific words.
- Don't make any assumptions when writing a release. You know more about the subject than the editor or reader.
- Include a quote (written in conversational style) in the first three of four paragraphs of the release. It builds credibility for the story.

- Build the release around the lead. Amplify the elements introduced in the lead, providing details and explanation.
- Do NOT make the release too long (two pages maximum). If you think more information is essential, attach fact sheets or background materials to the release.
- Always have at least one other person edit and proofread the release before it is distributed. Accuracy is essential and mistakes are unforgivable in the news business.
- Make sure the release covers who, what, when, where, why and how. Answer all of the questions.
- Always provide the names and phone numbers of two people that can be contacted for more information. If the primary contact is not available, the secondary contact can be reached.
- Always spell out acronyms in the first reference so the reader knows what you're talking about.

Example:

“The California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) is moving ahead with its public education program.”

Sample Press Release

Use Agency Letterhead

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(Date of release)

Contact: (Primary Contact Name)

(Phone Number)

(Secondary Contact Name)

(Phone Number)

Anytown Water District Launches Campaign on Proper Pesticide Use and Pest Management

(Anytown, Calif.) — The Anytown Water District today launched a campaign to educate consumers about proper pesticide use and disposal, and integrated pest management. The campaign’s theme, “*H₂O Home to Ocean*”, focuses on informing the public about the wise use and disposal of pesticides from homes and gardens.

(Integrated pest management, or IPM, is an approach that uses biological, cultural, physical, and chemical tools in various combinations that minimize effects on the environment while maximizing control of pests.)

Research has shown that improper use and disposal of pesticides — including household cleaning and gardening products — may contaminate local waterways. By educating consumers about proper use and disposal of pesticides, the district wants to reduce the amount of pesticide runoff that flows to the ocean.

“We must make people aware of the connection between pesticide use in homes and gardens and the impact on water quality,” said John Smith, manager at the Anytown Water District.

(NOTE: If your district has information such as the amount of water treated monthly or annually, or statistics on pesticide detections in your treatment plants, add some details here to give the press release stronger “news value.”)

The *H₂O Home to Ocean* campaign will run through the spring and summer growing season. For more information on how local residents can help, call _____ or write _____.

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Tips for Writing Media Advisories and Alerts

- Media advisories and alerts are used to notify the media regarding an event or press conference.
- If notifying the media a week ahead of time, use the “media advisory” heading.
- If reminding media the day before an event or the day of an event, use the “media alert” heading.
- Advisories and alerts are not written like a press release. They do not tell the story; they simply provide basic information to generate media interest.
- Media advisories provide the basics of who, what, when, why, and information such as directions to an event site, interview opportunities, or visuals for television cameras.
- Always provide information at the top of the page for two contact people with phone numbers and location (city) if applicable.

Sample Media Advisory/Alert

(Date) _____ **Contact:** (Primary Contact Name)
(Phone Number)
(Secondary Contact Name)
(Phone Number)

Land Park Cleans Up the Neighborhood on October 29

Who: The residents of the Land Park neighborhood association, the Anytown Water District and the county hazardous waste department announce a neighborhood clean-up day.

What: The residents of Land Park will clean out their cupboards and clean up their streets during a one-day neighborhood clean-up day. In conjunction with the county's hazardous waste department, residents may dispose of pesticides and other hazardous materials left over from gardening and home improvement projects.

Why: This event allows residents to rid their houses of unwanted pesticides and keep their streets and storm drains clean by properly disposing of pesticides and other toxins.

When: Saturday, October 29, 1998 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Where: Land Park Community Center, 1000 Main Street

Visuals: Neighbors will take part in stenciling prevention messages on curbs near storm drains.

Directions: From I-5, take the First Street Exit and take a left on Main Street. The community center is located on the right side of the street.

Selecting the Best Spokesperson

Selecting the appropriate spokesperson to represent your efforts to the media can be very challenging. For backup, it's best to have two spokespersons trained and available for interviews. The choice of who will represent you in this outreach program should be based primarily on their knowledge of pesticide issues, their credibility in representing the district, and on their skill and comfort level in dealing with the media and the public. For example, two appropriate spokespersons might be the executive director and an environmental engineer. Many executive directors are either not naturally media-savvy or are too busy to fit interviews into a schedule.

Media training is absolutely essential, given the potentially charged nature of the subject matter. The interviewer may dwell on the harmful aspects of pesticides if someone is not trained to make a smooth transition into an answer exploring responsible use and disposal of products. Media training is available from some public relations firms and many professional associations and government agencies. It is also important that your spokesperson is trained in the subject matter and is comfortable speaking about pesticides and IPM. Local nurseries, libraries, universities, master gardeners and DPR can provide you with information on pesticides and IPM.



Weigh these factors carefully before making the choice:

Credibility/knowledge

Schedule/availability

Willingness

Speaking qualities

Physical presence

Another credible spokesperson is a subject matter expert who does not necessarily work for you. Someone outside the POTW district who possesses scientific credentials can make a compelling case in the call for greater awareness of responsible handling of pesticides. This can be someone from a university or a government agency. A recent study among consumers shows that the most credible sources of information come from those directly in the business of managing the subject area. After that comes university representatives and then government officials. Environmental groups had credibility in environmental issues, but significantly less than university representatives.

Tips for Dealing with the Media

Here are some tips for successful print media interviews:

- Know who you're talking to — the reporter's track record and style.
- There is no such thing as "off the record."
- It is common for a reporter to use a tape recorder. Don't let it unnerve you; it increases your chances of being quoted correctly.
- Be sure the reporter knows where to reach you or a designated alternate spokesperson for additional information.
- Never ask to read the reporter's copy or request changes before publication.
- If a reporter writes a story that seriously misrepresents the facts, contact the publication's editor and ask for a correction. Be prepared to explain in detail why a correction is needed.
- Don't complain about minor slips in an otherwise accurate story. Complaining about minor matters or perspective can antagonize the reporter.
- Reporters often make a telephone call to ask for a source or a quick note to balance a story. If you are called, remember that you are under no obligation to answer immediately. Ask for the reporter's deadline and

promise to get back with a response. Return the call only after you feel confident of your position and the facts. However, it is imperative to respect the reporter's deadline.

- If you are asked a question that should be answered from a different perspective, refer the reporter to the appropriate source.

Some additional pointers for general media interaction:

- Speak in "headlines." Offer conclusion first, briefly and directly, and back it with facts.
- Don't over-answer. Short answers are better than long ones.
- Don't be fixated by the question. Find a way to get from the question to a point you want to make and then move on.
- Asked about a problem? Talk about a solution.
- Don't let false charges, facts or figures offered by a reporter stand uncorrected.
- Don't repeat a reporter's negative statements. Reply with a positive.
- Speak clearly. Avoid jargon, "bureaucratese" or "environmentalese."
- Be engaging, likable.

- Don't know the answer? Don't fake it. If appropriate, assure the reporter you will find and provide the needed facts in a timely manner, or offer to assist the reporter in finding that other source.
- Don't overlap the interviewer's question: begin when the reporter is finished.
- Keep cool. Don't be provoked.
- Never lie to a reporter.

General communications guidelines whether giving a speech or discussing a program opportunity:

- Talk from the viewpoint of your audience's interest.
 - Know your audience.
 - Don't use jargon.
- Don't mistake a reporter for your audience.
 - A reporter is the conduit to get your message to the audience — the reporter's readers or listeners.
- Speak in personal terms whenever possible to enhance credibility.
- If you do not want a statement quoted, do not make it.
 - There is no such thing as an "off the record" or "not for attribution" statement.

- Off-the-cuff statements made in the studio, in the elevator, or on the way to lunch run the risk of making headlines the next day.
 - Statements made for backgrounding or briefing purposes are always subject to being quoted.
 - If an inaccurate statement is made by a reporter or by you, correct it immediately.
- Do not argue or lose your cool.
 - Gracefully get around an argument by "bridging" back to your key messages. (See explanation later in this section.)
 - Defensiveness generates a hostile feeling.
 - Reporters and competitors can be deliberately argumentative to elicit a response. Remember that you are in a public environment.
 - If a question contains negative language or words you don't like, do not repeat the reporter's negative words.
 - You run the risk of having the reporter's negative language attributed to you.
 - Find a neutral "agreement" word and build a bridge to the point you want to make.

- A direct question deserves a direct answer.
 - Answer the question, then bridge to a message.
- If you don't know an answer, say so.
 - Don't speculate.
 - Refer the person to someone who can answer the question or tell the person you will get back to him later — and do so.
- If you cannot answer a question, never say the words, “no comment.”
 - Always give a valid reason for not being able to answer. For example, a legal case is pending or the information requested is of a proprietary nature.
- Listen to the question.
 - Be sensitive to the reporter's intent.
 - If you miss the point of a question, you may appear to be evasive.
 - If you are unsure of the question, rephrase it before answering.
- Always answer questions honestly.
 - Tell the truth, even if it hurts.
 - Avoid any temptation to exaggerate the positive.
- Provide good, solid information, but don't be overwhelming.
 - Provide summaries.
- Give all audiences — the media, analysts, industry representatives, employees, regulatory officials — the same message.
 - Speaking with “one voice” enhances credibility.
- Expect the media to get things wrong, but quickly correct misinformation in writing, if a significant error was made.

Message Delivery — Basic Means and Methods

A vital component of any communications effort is setting objectives. Your objectives are the action(s) you want your audience to take. Without a clear idea of these goals, you cannot communicate effectively.

Ask yourself what action you'd like the people to take as a result of hearing you speak. For instance, you are speaking to a gardening publication that reaches pesticide users. Do you want them to:

- think that they have no control over their environment and that to be environmentally responsible takes a lot of time and effort? (No!)
- think that they just need to plan ahead and be aware of disposal options for home pesticide use to be good environmental citizens. (Better.)



The goal for any media encounter is to be in control and present positive information on how your customers can be part of an environmental solution.

People tend to listen selectively — to tune out much of what they hear. On average, people retain less than 10 percent of the verbal information they receive. Therefore, to meet your communications objectives, develop concise messages for your target consumer via media interviews.

Message points will assist you in focusing on the aspects of your story before every interview. Brief attention-getting and memorable messages punch through the clutter of competing messages.

To add credibility and therefore believability, messages must be supported with various kinds of information. There are many ways to build support. Common techniques include:

Facts. Statements that are unlikely to be disputed, or that can be verified quantitatively.

Statistics. Statistics should be used sparingly and are most effective when they can be put into easy-to-understand terms. For example, saying “one out of three” paints a more memorable image than saying “33 percent.”

Third-party endorsement. Quoting an objective third party adds credibility to any statement. This could be a scientist, environmental expert or community activist.

Analogy or comparison. Using an analogy or comparison makes your statements more memorable.

Personal experience. Employing personal experience to illustrate your point enables your audience to relate to and comprehend your message.

Story or anecdote. A short, interesting story that illustrates your point can be very effective.

Delivering the Message

It's OK to be repetitious. During a discussion, it is to your advantage to use your messages as many times as possible, using different kinds of support to give variety. The questions you are asked will not always lead you directly to your prepared messages, however. Using some simple control techniques, you will be able to deal with a question and direct the focus of the answer to successfully communicate your message. You will also be able to influence the types of follow-up questions that are used during the discussion.

Bridging

This is a technique used to move from one topic to another or to make a smooth transition from a difficult subject to something you feel is more important. It involves responding to the questions, then promptly following with your message.

Simple examples of bridging phrases are:

“Yes . . .” (answer),
“and in addition to that . . .”

“No . . .” (answer),
“let me explain . . .”

“I don't know . . .
but what I do know is . . .”

“That's the way it used to be . . .
here's what we do now . . .”

Agreement/Transition

Another way to bridge is to find a common word agreement within the question and use it as a pivot within a transition that points you straight to your key message and supporting points. For example, faced with this question:

“Why can't you treat the water so chemicals and pesticides won't be passed on to surface or ground water?”

There doesn't appear to be much you'd want to agree with. Instead of taking it head on with a negative, defensive answer, use the word “treat” as your agreement and then make a transition to a positive:

“We use all the latest technology available to treat our water . . .”

Highlighting

Highlighting is a technique used to influence the next questions you will be asked. It calls for you to end your message with a statement that requires a follow-up question. This technique is most often used in media interviews. For example:

“. . . You'd probably be interested in some of the planned activities.”

“. . . that's the second-most important issue.”

Each of the highlighting statements listed above begs a follow-up question.

Headlining

This is a simple but very important way of helping your audience remember your message by emphasizing or flagging what you consider to be most important.

Examples:

“... but, the most important point to remember is ...”

“I’ve talked about a lot of things today. It boils down to these three things . . .”

Using this as a summary technique in a discussion allows the last impression to be the most positive and important.

Nervousness

Feeling nervous before or during an interview is normal and can even work to your advantage. The symptoms of nervousness — sweaty palms, nervous stomach and perspiration — are caused by increased adrenaline in your system. By learning to control rather than eliminate nervousness, you can make the extra energy work for you. Taking control of your nervousness can also build confidence. Following are simple steps to help control nervousness:

- Know your subject matter and the major points you want to make.
- Arrive early and get a feel for the surroundings.
- If you have a few moments in private, practice a few relaxing exercises — rolling your neck, swinging your arms

and stretching. In public settings, isometric exercises (alternately tensing and relaxing muscles in arms and legs) can be done without attracting attention.

- Take a deep breath, hold it for four seconds, and then slowly exhale.
- Before you begin to speak, establish eye contact with the person.
- Don’t think of the person as hostile or challenging, but merely neutral, waiting for you to interest them.

Body Language

Gestures and facial expressions can either enhance your message or detract from it. To be effective, expressions and gestures must be consistent with your subject matter. For instance, excessive smiling (often a nervous response) while discussing a serious subject reduces your credibility.

The following gestures and expressions convey confidence and can increase your credibility:

- Looking people in the eye.
- Leaning slightly forward, if seated.
- Making hand movements that occur naturally to supplement what you are saying.
- Listening actively when others are speaking.

The following gestures and expressions convey a negative impression and can detract from your message:

- Clasp hands tightly.
- Gripping the sides of chairs, tables or your knees.
- Toying with pencils, water glasses, buttons or microphones.
- Drumming fingertips on a table top or podium.
- Casting eyes toward the ceiling.
- Slouching posture.
- Closing eyes.
- Backing away from interviewer.
- Swiveling in a chair or moving legs and feet constantly.

For Television Interviews

- Avoid solid black or white or busy patterns in attire. Bright colors are fine.
- Don't wear large, shiny or noisy jewelry.
- Sit erect, but not ramrod-straight, slightly forward in the chair. Unbutton suit jacket when seated (if you wear one).
- Resist the urge to shout into the microphone. Speak and gesture naturally.

- Talk to the reporter/interviewer, not the camera.
- Keep a pleasant expression; smile when appropriate.
 - Hold your interview attitude from the moment the camera is set up until the interview is completely over, the camera is off and the host is up or getting the microphone off.

Summary

- You have a positive story to tell about your efforts to protect the environment. Your message points are your guideposts. Use them to get you to where you want to go in the conversation.
- Don't repeat a negative or allow someone to put you on the defensive.
- There is no such thing as "off the record" or "just between you and me."
- Be honest. Be proud. Enjoy yourself.