



## BEING A GOOD SPOKESPERSON

### Tips for Interviewing

Whether you are doing a media interview on camera, on the radio or over the telephone, be aware of the way you appear. Speak clearly, speak in positive terms, keep your message clear and consistent, and stay in control of the interview.

When possible, try to get your points across even if the reporter doesn't ask you directly. It's a good idea to stick to the facts when being interviewed and stay away from opinions. Here are some guidelines:

### Be Prepared

Know your material and review related issues that may be tied to your story. For telephone interviews, have written material right in front of you in case you need to check a statistic.

Consider providing the reporter with the *Arson Facts; The National Vacant/Abandoned Building Fire Problem* included in this media kit plus pre-printed quotes to minimize the possibility of factual error in the story.

It's a good idea to spend time prior to the interview speaking with the reporter about the vacant building problem in general so they understand the big picture. Avoid jargon! Don't assume the reporter has any particular expertise in this area. We've found that most reporters want to do an accurate, interesting story and they often work on tight deadlines so be on time yourself!

Tying your message to events in the local area will help you establish the story's relevance and get on the air. Do some research with local fire departments and building commissioners.

Decide before the interview what core message you want to communicate and lead the reporter to that information. Have in mind a strong closing statement that sums up the most important points you want to communicate. Repeat this information even if you've already said it before, because opening and closing statements are the easiest for editors to locate.

*It's okay to say, "I don't know."*

If you are asked a question you don't know the answer to, say so. It is much better to tell a reporter you don't know than to "guesstimate" and be embarrassed later. Tell the reporter you'll try to find the answer and be sure to follow up in a timely manner.

*There's No Such Thing As "Off the Record."*

Speaking off the record with a reporter can be risky and is not advisable. Stick to the facts and what you plan to address ahead of time. Professional reporters who have an ethical track record will sometimes agree to the following *ground rules* prior to the interview:

- On the Record: As soon as someone says, *I'm a reporter*, you are on notice that anything you say can be used in print, quoting you by name, title and company affiliation.
- Not-for-Attrition: If you want to answer a reporter's question but don't want to be quoted by name say so first.
- Off-the-Record: Technically means that you don't want to see the information you are providing in print.
- Background: You won't be quoted directly but the reporter can take the information you provide and confirm it with another source.

At the end of the interview ask the reporter to read their notes back to you.

## TV Tips

Prepare for on-camera interviews, but don't rehearse a script, as the reporter may arrive with completely different questions than you expect. Thoroughly review any pertinent information, statistics, etc., and practice framing answers. Unless you are directed otherwise, look at the reporter, not into the camera. Maintain eye contact. Don't fidget, use your hands excessively or rock or swivel in your chair. If you have access to a video camera, practice with it so you can spot any characteristics which detract from your ability to communicate or which make you seem insincere.

