



HOW TO PITCH YOUR LOCAL MEDIA

With your news release or media alert complete, it is important to know and understand the media before you make your first call (or pitch).

WHAT IS YOUR GOAL

Before calling your local media, take time to determine your overall goal in getting press coverage. Ask yourself:

- Is our event or issue newsworthy?
- How is our event different from other local events?
- Are we trying to educate the community to prepare for fire season?
- Are we educating the community about the new defensible space law?
- Do we need volunteer help?
- Is this information in the news release or media alert that I sent over?

WHO TO PITCH

Keep this goal in mind when you're reading your newspaper, watching local television news or listening to the radio. Keep track of the names and outlets (newspaper name and TV or radio station) where reporters that are covering wildfire issues. If there is a specific reporter who has covered fire safety issues in the past, this should be your first point of contact.

If you cannot find who the right person to contact is, take time to research the Web site and find out who has written similar stories in the past. You can also call the news desk and ask to speak to an editorial assistant. The editorial assistant should be able to help you figure out who will be most interested in covering your story.

WHEN TO PITCH MEDIA

Members of the media work on strict deadlines. When you reach the reporter, ask if they are "on deadline." If they are, ask when the best time to call is and contact them at this time.

Mornings are preferable for newspaper reporters. This is when they are most easily reached and have more time to talk. Reporters are generally on location covering stories in the afternoon and write in the afternoon and early evening.

Television media has assignment editors who staff the newsroom phones throughout the day and night. It is best to call them between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m., unless you have breaking news. This way you can avoid their busy time during the morning and afternoon newscasts and get their attention for your story.

PITCHING TIPS

Now, you are ready to call the media. Use these steps below as a guideline:

- Make sure you give the media a day or two of lead time before your event, if possible.
- When you call a reporter, identify yourself and the organization you are calling from.
- Ask if it is a good time or ask if they are on “deadline.” If it is not a good time to call, ask when a better time would be and make sure you follow-up.
- Briefly explain what it is you are calling about and that you would like them to consider covering/writing a story on it.
- Be prepared to give answers to the reporter’s questions, so learn your subject. If you do not have the answer, tell them you will find out and call them back as soon as you do.
- Let the reporter know about opportunities to speak to an authority figure or get a first-hand experience, such as coming out to see your volunteers in action.
- Ask if you can fax or e-mail additional information to them, such as a news release or fact sheet.
- Give them your contact information and let them know they can call you with additional questions.
- Thank them for their time.

SAMPLE PITCH CALL SCRIPT

For example, you are planning a big community volunteer event to clear a dangerously overgrown fuel break:

“Hello, my name is _____, and I’m calling with (your organization). Is this a good time to talk?”

[If so... continue the conversation]

I wanted to let you know about a great event we are doing on Thursday called “Fire Free Friday.” One hundred volunteers from the area will help us clear 10

acres of brush right outside the city to prepare for this year's wildfire season. In addition, (notable official) will make an appearance and lend a hand as well. We'd like to invite you to cover this event, and if you'd like, assist us in clearing the brush.

(Here, you may be asked to elaborate more on the event and you can include data and stats)

I have additional information I'd like to send to you. Would you prefer me to fax or e-mail it? Also, you can reach me at (phone number) with any questions. Thanks very much for your time and consideration!"