

NEWS GATHERINGS

(November 1996)

0637

At times, an information officer handles the staging or publicity of special events such as an open house, dedication, or conference. In planning news gatherings, the department uses the Incident Command System to delegate duties.

The information officer's duties include publicity and media packet information (for Media Packets - [see section](#)). There are two types of news gatherings: publicized events and news conferences.

PUBLICIZED EVENTS

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0637.1

In staging a publicized event, preparation prevents problems:

- Plan the agenda in detail.
- Schedule speakers and the master of ceremonies (M.C.); be aware of protocol in arranging the order of speakers and the seating arrangements.
- Prepare announcements to the media and to employees of CAL FIRE.
- Prepare special invitations to key people, organizations, and agencies.
- Make a "contact list" with names, addresses, and phone numbers of everyone who assisted in the preparation. This could help in preparing future events.
- Arrange for clergy, color guard, or entertainment where appropriate.
- Visit the site and be sure it is cleaned up and ready.
- Make contingency plans for bad weather, no-shows, etc.
- Prepare and distribute a detailed itinerary for the entire day. Include arrival of officials, who will meet them, transportation, etc.

On the day of the event:

- Arrive early and review your checklist.
- Place directional signs if needed.

- Arrange seating for speakers; prepare a reserved section for officials and the media.
- Make sure the public address system is ready and working; check on audio/visual equipment if needed.
- Make sure the media information room is ready for passing out media packets, badges, and additional information. Provide a room with adequate space for equipment and lighting for news interviews.
- Make sure the ushers are ready, distribution of programs is arranged, and crowd and traffic controls are provided.
- Check the speaker platform(s). See that it includes flags and seals (the American flag should be on the audience's left and the state flag on the right).
- Make sure the photographers are ready, the band is on hand, the clergy, color guard, etc. are present, and so on.
- Check on certificates, awards, plaques, etc. Make sure they are signed and on hand (in the podium or with the appropriate person).

After the event:

- Have a definite ending (have the M.C. announce the end and say thank you for coming).
- Allow time for media access to officials.
- If appropriate, provide a tour of the area for officials and media (with a bus so that all can be together).
- Provide transportation for officials as needed.
- Oversee the cleanup of the area.
- Collect news clippings and photos; send them to officials and include them in an event file.
- Evaluate what happened, right and wrong. Learn from your mistakes.

Now you can have that nervous breakdown you've been promising yourself.

NEWS CONFERENCE

(November 1996)

0637.2

News conferences fall into two categories: one that is scheduled ahead of time and one with an immediate need, usually tied to an unplanned event such as an emergency incident or a visiting dignitary.

Information personnel may call a news conference when there is something important to say and this is the best way to present it. A conference works best for complex information which is difficult to explain in a news release, for occasions of significant importance, or for facilitating the dissemination of information in a more timely manner. Examples may include:

- Spokespersons of cooperating agencies touring fire disaster areas (CAL FIRE, USFS, BLM, National Guard, Governor, etc.)
- Dedications of facilities or equipment
- Fire conferences with dignitaries in attendance
- Forest pest infestation
- New equipment, such as a rescue tool, engine, airtanker, etc.
- Tax initiatives for additional funding, or revenue loss, season augmentation, etc.
- Heroic events
- Benevolent fund/fund raising

The following describes how to call a news conference:

- If possible start two weeks in advance.
- Find a suitable location. Consider accessibility, telephones, adequate space for camera and lighting equipment, etc.
- Select a mid-week date if possible, around 10 a.m.
- Send out an editor advisory of the upcoming date to reserve their time.
- Prepare media packets (2 weeks before).

- Issue conference news release (2 to 3 days before).
- Make follow-up phone calls (1 day before). Don't pressure the media; just tell them the importance of the event and let them make up their own minds.

The following are suggestions on how to prepare for the news conference:

- Hold a practice session.
- Generate a list of all possible questions and responses.
- Make sure all speakers know which points to stress.
- Arrive early at the conference.
- Post necessary signs.
- Provide media packets to all media representatives.
- Have media packets available at the door.
- Make speakers available individually at the end.
- Keep record of attending news media.

A rough time frame for publicity is as follows:

3- 4 months	Provide information to major publications on activity calendars.
2 months	Develop in-house publications.
1 month	Prepare brochures and itineraries.
3 weeks	Send letters of invitation to employees, media editors advisory etc.
2 weeks	Prepare publicity posters, feature stories, public service announcements. Put together media packets.
1 week	Announce event release and release media packets.
2 or 3 days	Make conference news release.
1 day	Make follow-up phone calls.

MEDIA DAY

(November 1996)

0637.3

One example of an event which can inform and involve the press is Media Day at the Academy. Beginning in 1987, the CAL FIRE Academy in Lone has opened its classrooms, simulators, and firegrounds to the press for one day in the spring. Reporters are encouraged to go up against the "xmas tree" and the structure fire, drive the skid pan, and fight fire on the sand table. Everything the students do is offered to the reporters, and the resulting stories often reflect an increased understanding and respect for our firefighters.

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