

## **MEDIA REQUIREMENTS**

**0663**

(September 1991)

Each news medium has its special requirements. The following sections describe considerations information personnel should take into account when releasing news and information to different types of media.

## **WIRE SERVICES**

**0663.1**

(September 1991)

The easiest way to disseminate information to the news media as a whole is to notify the wire services at the onset of an emergency operation. By including the Incident Information Center phone number in the first report, one provides all wire service subscribers with the opportunity to call in for additional details or a live report.

Wire services which have central offices and field reporters or correspondents serving all areas provide continual updates to all subscribers. They provide separate written news reports for print and electronic media, as well as photographic coverage. However, some smaller media outlets do not subscribe.

Several wire syndicates serve California. Information personnel should check the unit media guide for any print and video services that may be available in the area.

## **NEWSPAPERS**

**0663.2**

(September 1991)

Print reporters usually accept all information offered. They will follow-up by asking questions, seeking an opinion, or requesting a prediction about problem areas or an anticipated control time. This line of inquiry makes information personnel highly vulnerable to making misleading statements or overstating the situation. Information officers must make sure to understand each question, stay alert, think before responding, and avoid offering personal opinions--stick to the facts.

Reporters commonly probe to obtain information beyond the facts released to everyone. This is the sign of a good reporter. They are simply trying to improve the story by gaining exclusive information or a more interesting angle. Information personnel should try to anticipate the purpose of a leading question. The best defense against this tactic is to be direct and stick to factual information. If the question is unclear, ask to have it restated. Also do not be afraid to say, "I don't know," or "I'll have to call you back on that." For more information on dealing with reporters, see [Section 0636](#), Interview Tips.

Most reporters will call back either to clarify details while they are writing the story or to update key details shortly before their deadlines. Newspapers may have more than one daily deadline.

Remember, the least experienced newsperson is most likely to be covering the story for the local weekly or as a resident "stringer" for the daily which serves the area. Information personnel may have to explain details more explicitly to these reporters. On the other hand, these reporters can provide the most effective media coverage to the local residents. They can provide information about temporary changes in local services, traffic controls, availability of utilities and essential supplies, emergency centers, and local aid facilities. Weekly newspaper editors may be persuaded to print a special issue or bulletin if the immediate situation calls for one.

## **TELEVISION** (September 1991)

**0663.3**

A television reporting team usually consists of a reporter and a camera operator. Small stations may send a single person to handle both assignments. Major network stations may have three or four member teams which include reporters, camera operators, sound technicians, and assistants. In each case, the reporter is in charge and should be the primary contact for any arrangements.

The television team (or at least the camera operator) must be at the scene of the action to tape sequences pertaining to the accompanying narration. Each reporter will have a different idea about handling coverage, so each team will require different camera shots. This situation requires special consideration by the information personnel.

The Assistant Information Officer must be flexible and candid while working out arrangements to satisfy taping needs without endangering the camera crew or interfering with the emergency action. The Air Operations director coordinates flights undertaken either by CAL FIRE controlled aircraft or media aircraft. At the discretion of the Incident Commander, CAL FIRE aircraft may be used for media flights, providing such use does not interfere with emergency actions. For more information on media flights, see [Section 0661.2](#), Overflights and Use of Aircraft.

Many television stations have live transmission capability from mobile units. From these units, reporters can cover nearby emergencies immediately upon arrival. Helicopters, similarly equipped, can transmit over much longer distances.

With news offices routinely monitoring emergency frequencies on radio scanners, television crews can be dispatched or diverted from other assignments by radio at the same time as the emergency dispatch. As a result, television crews can arrive at the scene of an emergency nearly as quickly as emergency crews. The information teams should be ready for the media with sufficient personnel.

In addition to scenes of emergency activity, television crews usually want camera shots showing background, people, support, and other related elements. For interviews, information officers should be ready to recommend an appropriate background setting. When apart from emergency action, consider the Incident base, burned-over area, smoke-filled sky, evacuees, emergency vehicle with flashing lights, map, or the Incident Command Post as possible backgrounds.

Television's need for sight and sound action requires the camera operator to be in the midst of the emergency. Although a newspaper photographer also needs a visual story, a single photo will suffice. Television needs action sequences from beginning to end for continuity and may require several sequences from various camera locations, including close-ups.

Information personnel should provide television crews with necessary safety clothing (fire resistant clothing, hard hat, gloves, fireshelter, etc., and an experienced Assistant Information Officer who is familiar with fire dangers and firefighting action should accompany the crews. The TV crews may wish to use their own special vehicles because of the equipment they contain, but the ideal arrangement is for the crew to accompany the Assistant Information Officer in a CAL FIRE radio-equipped emergency sedan or pickup.

## **RADIO**

**0663.4**

(September 1991)

The greatest part of the workload at the Information Center involves radio. Because of the repetitious nature of reporting the fire story continuously over the telephone, the job calls for special talents and training. Information personnel are CAL FIRE to hundreds or millions of people during an incident. What information officers say, how they say it, and how they sound reflects the department's image.

Information personnel should answer incoming phone calls, "Information Center," or "Fire information," followed by one's name. When more than one center is in operation in an area, preface the salutation with the incident name.

Information officers log all incoming and outgoing phone reports, office visits, and field contacts involving the media or public on [News Release Log](#), Form FI-4.

Phone reports can be in question and answer format or narrative statement. The information specialist must assume every report is taped and speak accordingly. Radio reports may be taped for a later broadcast or transmitted live as the telephone report is made. The information specialist must attempt to find out if the phone report is live or taped beforehand. Radio reporters usually make this point known with their opening greeting, but there are exceptions. Therefore, information specialists should handle all radio interviews as if they are being taped.

Radio reports usually last from 20 seconds to a minute, but taped questioning may continue somewhat longer because each reply can be aired separately. Although information personnel should follow "yes" or "no" answers with a short explanation, responses to questions should be kept brief.

Information personnel should not be concerned with the newscaster's method for introductions unless asked. Each station varies its handling of on-scene reporting. Usually the radio reporter summarizes the situation and then introduces the information specialist for details or explanation. The reporter will let you know if you need to introduce yourself or close the report in any special way.

To make a radio report, the information specialist determines the time of the last direct report by reviewing the [News Release Log](#) (Form FI-4) and highlights subsequent developments. Start with what is happening now and what is changing, relate what is ahead in weather, exposures, and control forecast, and summarize the general situation and earlier events. The incident location should be identified by a well-known landmark or city that is recognizable to the audience.

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