



EFFECTIVE WAYS TO PURSUE MEDIA COVERAGE

Natural gas company spokespeople are a valuable commodity to the local news media. On the issue of natural gas safety, your company spokesperson is the expert; especially in relation to what the news media knows or has time to learn.

Every time you give news to a member of the media, it is an opportunity to educate him or her about natural gas safety for a potential future story. But remember, just because a news release or event is interesting to you and your company, does not mean it is to a reporter. Whether or not your piece of news is picked up, the reporter that you've spoken with may remember you and consult you down the road when he or she needs an expert opinion on a natural-gas-related situation.

That's not to say that reporters are wide open and available to speak to you at any moment. They're often incredibly busy people with no more than a brief minute to listen to you. With that said, please read the following tips for successfully pursuing media coverage:

- Find your news "hook." – Whether or not you think your issue/event/situation is news has no bearing on what the media thinks. The best way to ensure that your story appears on the news is to find a "hook" to hang it on. Commemorations like Arbor Day or Natural Gas Safety Day (if possible) are news hooks. Schedule a special event around these in order to bring attention to natural gas safety.

The list of story ideas to be pitched to local media outlets, included in this kit, is a good resource to use when coming up with news hooks.

- When to make initial contact – Only contact a reporter when you have a valuable news hook. If the reporter declines your story, feel free to politely inquire as to why and make a note of his or her response. By doing this, you gain valuable insight into what reporters consider to be news and what they do not. Don't be discouraged by being declined – it could just be that there is breaking news and your story is not. Being informed about why your story was declined can help you decide, in the future, whether or not a topic is potentially newsworthy.
- Making initial contact – Each reporter is different as to whether he or she prefers to be contacted via phone, fax, e-mail or regular mail. If you don't know which method of communication a specific reporter prefers, go ahead and e-mail or fax the information first. It's important to never assume that e-mail or faxing is enough. Reporters are scanners – they spend brief seconds on faxes and e-mails, thus it's vital to follow-up by phone within 24 hours of sending the information. You'd be surprised at how often a reporter will ask you to send it again, because they scanned it the first time too quickly, or never read it at all.
- Respond quickly to all media inquiries – To establish positive rapport with a certain reporter or media outlet, you need to be available when they need you.