

WHAT TO SAY TO THE MEDIA

Media coverage of your disaster can be both a good and a bad thing. The press can relay your requests for volunteers, donations and other needs, but they can also disrupt your response process. The media liaison or public relations officer should handle all media inquiries.

- If a response worker is approached by a reporter, he or she should refer the reporter to PR instead of stopping work to answer questions.
- Speak clearly and calmly; be accurate and don't exaggerate or dramatize facts. Try not to be defensive when answering questions, and don't be afraid to say you don't know the answer.
- Reporters will want background information on your institution and its collections, so compile it as soon as you can. But be sure not to give away information about anonymous donors or invade anyone's privacy.
- If you issue a news release, run it by any official first.
- Radio and television reporters are on tighter deadlines than print reporters, so return their calls first.

Tips: Interview Dos and Don'ts★

- Don't speculate about the cause of the disaster or whose fault it was, especially if it's still being investigated. Do say your institution is cooperating with the authorities.
- Don't guess about the timeline of response. Do say that your response team is working to return to normal operations.
- Don't talk about the monetary value of items or damages or about your insurance. Do talk about what items are safe or salvageable, especially well-known ones.
- Don't release names of injured individuals or casualties until you are sure their families have been notified.
- Do say "I don't know" rather than "no comment."
- Do keep your sentences simple.
- Do be consistent with each interviewer – have your facts straight and keep current with the situation so you don't have to correct yourself later.
- Don't speak off the record to anyone.
- Do make requests to the community for volunteers, donations, or whatever you need, and talk about how they will be used to help your institution and the items it cares for.
- Do get a copy of the video or article for your institution's documentation of the emergency.

★These general guidelines are adapted from the Heritage Preservation *Field Guide to Emergency Response*.