Using Media Effectively

Creating a working relationship with the various members of the local media will prove to be beneficial to your department in various situations. Beyond the traditional reporting of incident activities, the media can be a wonderful partner to your department in so many other areas. By simply reaching out to the media, your department can create a partnership that will be beneficial to the media, the department and, most important, your community.

This module will help you identify the ever-expanding media available to your organization, how to engage them with your department and how to utilize this partnership in effectively marketing your department by advertising and promoting the many programs and services your department provides to your community and its citizens.

The definition of the media, as well as the multitude of mediums they use, grows on a daily basis. In addition to the traditional print, television and radio outlets we have become comfortable with, we now must employ the newest and fastest growing segments of the media: the Internet and social media. These two areas potentially place reporting capabilities into the hands of a majority of your community, as anyone with a cell phone, a smart phone or Internet access can quickly report what your department is doing in the community.

The information in this module will help identify several critical components, including:

- Traditional Media Outlets

- Emerging Media Outlets

- Inclusion of the Media into your Community Fire Safety Coalition

- Notifying the Media of Emergency Incidents

- Marketing Department Events

- Hosting Media Day Events

Traditional Media Outlets

The majority of your citizens use traditional media to gather their news and keep up with what is occurring locally, nationally and globally. Traditional media includes: television, radio, daily newspapers and community newspapers. These outlets have been staples in the homes longer than anyone in your community can remember. They are available to your citizens for small and sometimes no fees, making their availability and popularity endless to the greatest number of your customers.

Television

Access to television comes in several means. Local and national networks are available as a free service through a simple home antenna. In most instances, citizens are also able to subscribe to cable and satellite companies for a fee, which gives them access to hundreds of added channels. Many of these outlets are also available through Internet access as well.

- **Local Television**
  Building relationships with your local television contacts is critical to getting your valuable message to your target audience. This group includes members from all the major networks: ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox. These contacts will be utilized for both interactions on the scene of emergency incidents as well as opportunities to be featured on the various news shows these networks produce and broadcast seven days a week.

- **Public Television**
  Public television stations can be a valuable partner for your department, but usually do not include local or "Breaking News" type of programming. They are more suited for public interest and public education programming,

both of which can be used to promote your organization and to broadcast valuable public fire safety information.

- **Network Television**
- **Cable Television**

Radio

Radio is distributed in two major modes: broadcast and satellite. Most of your citizens will listen to local broadcast radio on a daily basis. Statistics tell us that 85% of your citizens will listen to the radio every day, with them listening to an average of six stations each day. Many people listen to satellite radio also. With citizens spending so much time listening to the radio, this medium is an excellent venue to use to provide and promote valuable department information to the community.

Daily Newspapers

Your community's local daily newspaper has most likely been around for decades and is the the medium many of your citizens consult for their local news, many times first thing in the morning. The local newspaper is an excellent venue to report the emergency incidents your department responds to as well as all the other activities your department offers to the community.

Community Newspapers

Most jurisdictions have a community newspaper. Depending on the population, some larger jurisdictions may have more than one paper. Many communities with extremely large neighborhoods or divese geographic areas have more than one community

newspapers. Regardless of the size of your community, these community newspapers are very popular and are an excellent medium to pass on timely and critical department information. Promoting department events, recruiting new members, promoting fund drives and passing on public safety messages are just a few examples of how your department can effectively utilize these valuable publications.

Emerging Media Outlets

Internet

The Internet is proving to be one of the fastest growing mediums for your citizens to seek information. Most departments have access to a county or city web site and permission to develop a page specifically for the department. Many departments also develop stand alone web sites for their organization.

In either situation, one item is a constant: your web site needs constant attention. To ensure your web site always has current and correct information, you must establish a process, procedure or guideline on the management of the site. This critical, but often overlooked, step is essential to ensure your site is utilized by your community as a primary means for getting information about or from your department.

The following items are an excellent foundation of information to include when starting a department web site:

- Location of the department
- Pictures of facilities
- Pictures of apparatus
- Services provided
- Contact numbers for services, both emergency and non-emergency
- Membership requirements and steps
- Current events
- Fire and life safety tips
- Significant incident descriptions
- Pictures of incidents (HIPPA Proof)
- Mechanism to accept donations
- Awards and recognitions received
- Links and resources page
- E-mail receiving capability
- Smoke detector request form
- List server capabilities for sending mass safety information