



**PRESS & PUBLIC RELATIONS  
DEPARTMENT**

**MEDIA TRAINING MANUAL**

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**Why do we need the media?**

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- The media are never going to go away - in fact their number is steadily increasing - eg, Cable TV, which is at the scene of some incidents almost as quickly as the police. Evidence suggests the number of TV and radio stations will continue to increase.
- There is likely to be more than 40 TV channels by the end of the decade.
- Total daily newspaper audience (June '98) = 15m +
- Bham Evening Mail = 107,410
- Ex & Star = 161,836
- Cov Eve Tel = 62,279

**Example: A Cable TV team were transmitting live 20 minutes after they arrived at the scene of the Kegworth air crash.**

- We can use the media to get our message across - we need them as much as they need us.

**Example: A few minutes on Central TV knocks on over one million doors - what other medium could offer this?**

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## How can the media help?

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The media have a powerful influence on public opinion and can prove a useful and effective ally in gaining understanding and support.

The media can help you do your job - faster and often more effectively. Publicity often shocks people into giving information and puts pressure on offenders.

**Example: Almost 3,000 crimes are reported every year in the West Midlands using the Crimestoppers hotline.**

**Example: In the Stephanie Slater kidnapping Michael Samms was caught within hours of the evidence being transmitted on Crimewatch.**

- Members of the public have a *right* to know about crime being committed. If someone is raped or robbed in your road wouldn't YOU want to know?
- Awareness leads to vigilance and an awareness of crime prevention - how many households had burglar alarms 10 years ago?
- We are a public service and it is natural that people show interest in what we do.
- Lack of information often leads to unfounded speculation, inaccuracy and misunderstanding.
- The operational benefits from being open and honest with the media are clear - whether it is a witness appeal, crime prevention advice, warnings or appealing for help, the media can help us get our message across.

**REMEMBER:** We should not complain about poor media coverage if we are not spreading the word about the many positive stories and achievements occurring every day in the West Midlands.

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## What do the media want from a story?

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- Just like taking a statement, the media will want to know who, what, why, where, when and how.
- Clear and precise information
- Ages/occupations/addresses (where appropriate)/personal details
- Backgrounds of victims
- Photographs of victims in serious cases
- Access to victims if possible
- A vantage point where they can see what is happening in the case of a serious crime.
- **REMEMBER - IT IS NOT THE ROLE OF THE POLICE TO ACT AS CENSORS.** For example, in normal circumstances at the scene of an incident we should not prohibit people taking photographs- it is the job of the editor to decide whether or not photographs or film should be used.
- Lack of information leads to speculation.

**Example: In the Strangeways riot the first edition of the Manchester Evening News said '20 dead', which was pure speculation due to lack of information.**

- Don't forget media deadlines. The nature of today's news reporting can place huge demands upon the force but when releasing information to the media we should bear in mind news deadlines.

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## Who should talk to the media?

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- The main purpose of the Press & Public Relations Dept is to relieve officers from the pressure of speaking to the media. Why should they spend valuable time talking to journalists about handbag snatches?
- But don't forget - talking to the media gives YOU a chance to get your message across and build up a relationship with them. So there are occasions when you should talk to journalists.
- The question to ask yourself is **why shouldn't** you speak to the media rather than **why should** you.
- As a general rule, only inspectors and above should talk about policy related matters. The Press & Public Relations Dept has a wide range of policy related files available, many giving questions and answers to issues you may be asked about.
- If you are asked to give an interview ask yourself if you are the right person and whether anyone else needs to know. For example, your interview might lead to other requests for interviews or statements. Have you told the Press & PR Dept?
- The force's open policy means we should avoid giving 'no comment' statements as this may indicate we have something to hide. However, before responding we should take into account sensitive issues such as confidentiality, judicial decisions or disciplinary matters.
- Constables and sergeants are often 'naturals' at speaking to the media and, as a general rule, they should not be afraid to answer questions. But they should limit themselves to the **FACTS** and not speculate, give opinions or talk about policy-related issues.

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## Getting fair coverage

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- **What is the story?** Before taking part in an interview ask the journalist what do they want from you?
- At the end of an interview:
  - 1 Recap on your main points
  - 2 Ask if you have made your position clear
  - 3 Ask them to make sure they include appeals for witnesses, descriptions, etc. (They may not do this but at least you have asked.)
- If you are misquoted in a serious manner you should take the matter up immediately - either with the journalist or the editor. **CONTACT THE PRESS & PR DEPARTMENT FOR ADVICE.**
- Remember, a newspaper is entitled to put a slant on an editorial column but they will often allow us a 'right of reply' in the form of a letter or a feature-type piece.
- If the media have made a serious error there may be other remedies, for example, the Press Complaints Commission or the Broadcasting Complaints Commission. Advice **MUST BE SOUGHT** from the head of the Press & Public Relations Department before any official complaint is made.

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## How can the Press & Public Relations Department help you?

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- Apart from the press office at headquarters, there are two regional offices - in Coventry and Wolverhampton.  
  
The department is staffed by experienced former journalists who can give you help and advice.
- The main role of the department is to take the pressure of calls AWAY FROM YOU.
- The department is open between....
- Staff deal with up to 200 calls a day from the media
  - On average, we issue 500 press releases a year
  - Last year we arranged over 1,200 radio and TV interviews
- The department has information and briefing sheets available on a wide range of policy-related matters - these give the force stance and, if available, the ACPO and Fed views.
- The department produces News Beat every month, as well as the Chief Constable's Annual Report. It also publishes a wide range of leaflets and booklets. It is in charge of the Internet and monitors the force's corporate identity.
- We undertake 'on-site' radio training for small groups of officers and are planning to introduce on-site TV training.
- The department also offers professional sound quality sound booths for live interviews.
- The department also offers a press cutting and video taping service for police-related issues.



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### Getting the most out of an interview

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- You only get ONE CHANCE to make a first impression.
- People state the thing which gets their notice is: how people look (55%), by how people speak (38%), what they say (7%).
- The most important message is to PREPARE, PREPARE, PREPARE. What message do YOU want to get over during the interview? Think of about three key points and write them down.
- Think of the questions you are likely to be asked - especially difficult ones. How will you answer them? Think of two or three phrases you can use to sum up your message.
- You only get one chance to make a first impression. If you were doing a presentation to your staff you would plan what you were going to say. If you are on local TV you could be speaking to more than one million people.
- Try to rehearse the interview with a colleague asking the questions. Think about some anecdotes and keep them short and punchy. Try to avoid quoting statistics. Have any telephone numbers to hand.
- Keep control of the interview. If you are asked something unexpected answer it briefly then use a phrase like, "but the main point here is.." or "I think it's important to remember that..." and make the point you wanted to make.
- Remember deadlines - when can you get the maximum impact?
- Do not lie and do not hide behind the sub-judice rule.

- Use simple language and avoid jargon ie:

|                        |                         |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| people                 | not persons             |
| hid                    | not secreted themselves |
| premises               | house/flat etc          |
| made good their escape | ran off                 |
| dwelling               | home                    |
  
- Maintain eye contact with the interviewer and don't let your attention wander. Check the background.
  
- TELL journalists if someone has been arrested. They need to know once proceedings are active.

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### **Handling press conferences**

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- Press conferences should only be held for important issues - it is vital they are not devalued otherwise the media will stop turning up for them. ALWAYS seek guidance from the Press & PR Department BEFORE telling the media that you are planning to hold a press conference.
- Let the press office know as soon as possible if you want to hold a press conference. They take time to plan.
- Although you can give brief details at the scene of an incident, you need to establish ALL THE FACTS before holding a press conference, eg, Clinton McCurbin.
- Make sure that the place you chose to hold a press conference is large enough to hold everyone.
- Ensure you give journalists plenty of time to get to the press conference but be aware of deadlines.
- In the case of a major incident, the press conference should be headed by the senior investigating officer or his/her deputy.
- At the beginning of the press conference the press officer attending should introduce you, give your rank and set out any ground rules for interviews or questions.
- Where possible, ensure the press conference is tape recorded or notes are taken.

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## Handling the media at the scene of incidents

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- In the event of a major incident telephone the Press & PR Department as quickly as possible - don't wait for the media to start ringing. The sooner a press officer can get to the scene the better.
- Members of the media should not expect instant access to a site as there may be a criminal act to deal with or the site may be dangerous. However, they will expect:
  - 1 A good vantage point to see what is happening
  - 2 A police officer who can speak to them (even if they can't tell them much)
  - 3 A regular supply of information
- It is better for the force to arrange as many facilities as possible to give the media access under our control rather than to lose control of journalists/cameramen, etc, completely.
- If possible, try to establish a media rendezvous point near the scene of the incident to try to keep journalists together.
- If possible, try to drip feed the media with information - they welcome ANY pieces of information however insignificant they may seem.
- Speak to the Press Office to set a time for a press conference - this will help alleviate pressure at the scene.
- Don't make unrealistic requests to the media and don't seize cameras, film or video being taken at the scene - as in almost every case we have no legal right to do so.
- Explain why you need to clear an area and seek the help of the Press & Public Relations Dept if any difficulties or misunderstandings arise.

## TRAINING SCENARIO

### BODY FOUND IN SUSPICIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES

You have been contacted this morning by the local media who have been alerted to the fact that police have cordoned off part of a playing field near to Childs Avenue, Woodcross, Wolverhampton.

Some of the press have been told by contacts at ambulance that a body has been discovered.

The body is that of a young white man aged late teens- early 20s and appears to have been there some time. The body was behind some bushes.

It was found by schoolchildren who were playing in the fields and lost their football in the bushes.

The body does not appear to have any obvious marks, and a syringe was found near to the scene. The death is being treated as suspicious.

The body was dressed in blue jeans, a grey and blue sweater and training shoes. There was not identification on the body.

The scene is being preserved while police carry out checks. The body has been removed and a post mortem will take place this afternoon.

One line of enquiry is that the body could turn out to be misper Robert Harris aged 22 who went missing four months ago. Robert was a regular drug user and had been involved in a number of break-ins and thefts.

His family have done a lot of publicity with the local media in a bid to trace him and have been claiming that police aren't bothering to search for him as he has a criminal record.

Robert is described as a white male, 5'10 slim build, blue eyes last seen wearing blue jeans, a sweater and a grey anorak and trainers.