



CDFG, Marine Region

Mission Statement: To protect, maintain, enhance and restore California's marine ecosystems for their ecological values and their use and enjoyment by the public

TIPS FOR TALKING TO THE MEDIA

INTRODUCTION

If you know that you are going to have to interact with the media, this section provides some great information for you to use to help make your interaction go a little smoother. Take a moment to touch on the subjects listed below.

Respond to messages from a member of the press in a timely way. If they leave a message that includes a deadline, do your very best to respond in enough time to allow the reporter to meet their deadline. This means within 1-4 hours from receiving the message. Remember the press works on a deadline and we want to do whatever we can to help them produce a well researched story in a timely way.

You do not have to talk to members of the press or respond to questions if you choose not to. If you prefer not to talk to the press or think someone else is the best source for information on the subject you are being asked about, get the reporter's name and contact information and tell them you will have someone call them back to facilitate their request. Immediately pass the contact information onto Carrie Wilson at (831) 649-7191 or cwilson@dfg.ca.gov or Steve Martarano at smartara@dfg.ca.gov or (916) 322-8639

BASIC GUIDELINES

Before an interview with the Media, fill out the "Media Interview Preparation Worksheet". It will help you collect your thoughts and key points.

Ask the reporter for an overview of the story they are working on. This will:

- Give you some context for the questions you will be asked
- Help you steer the reporter in directions that will enhance their story

When you do respond to questions from a member of the press, keep the following points in mind. All statements by employees to the public must be based on:

- Accurate information
- Correct interpretations of the policy involved
- Nothing is ever really "off the record" even if that is what you are told.

When questions arise about sharing information:

- In cases where facts or policies are not clear, check with your supervisor or the Regional Manager before answering. Just tell the reporter that you're unsure and want to be sure you have the correct information. Ask if you can check and get right back with them. Incorrect information given out can be very difficult to pull back.

Consult the appropriate supervisor and/or OCEO prior to releasing any public

statements if there are any uncertainties concerning DFG policy.

INTERVIEWS WITH THE MEDIA

Make sure you fully understand a question before you answer. If need be, ask the reporter to repeat the question. If you need clarification about meaning or any other part of the question, ask for it. Don't ever answer a question until you are comfortable that you understand what's being asked.

During the Interview:

- Obtain the full name of a reporter
- Who he/she represents
- Make sure reporter has both your's and your supervisor's contact information
- Answer the questions
- Do not say "no comment"
- If you don't know the answer, say that and tell why you can't provide an answer, e.g., information not available, pending investigation, not confirmed, do not have the authority to release it, etc.
- Do not speculate
- Avoid answering hypothetical questions
- Bridge back to the facts and your message
- Nothing is off the record
- Assume the cameras are always on
- Assume any conversation with a reporter will be used
- Maintain control - Remember, you are the expert, ignore attempts to bait you or to use emotionally charged questions to provoke inappropriate or emotional responses
- Be confident, clear and committed to meeting the media's needs
- Make sure your statement is understood
- Repeat those parts of the statement that could easily be misunderstood
- Don't hurry through phone call interviews
- Be doubly sure the reporter has the correct facts
- Be prepared to spell names and terms phonetically
- Take notes

After the interview:

- Contact the reporter immediately if you overlooked important facts
- Always follow-up with additional information (if it's necessary) in a timely manner
- When you've finished talking with a reporter, report the contact via the electronic Media Contact Sheet available from the DFG Intranet site. Make this report immediately afterwards as media reports are sent to the Resources Agency and the Governor's office every day.

INTERVIEW TIPS

These are recommendations to help make an interview go smoothly:

- Be prepared
- Know what is happening
- Make your point first
- Get the point across quickly

- Add the additional information afterward
- Winging it will not work
- Be polite
- Rude, aggressive or antagonistic behavior feeds the media and can cause tension to rise leading to errors
- Be factual
- Be informative
- Avoid comments that cannot be supported by fact
- Say "I don't know" if you do not have the answer
- Be consistent
- Don't give statistics
- Be positive
- Come back to a message whenever and wherever possible
- Keep focused
- Make your point clear
- Be concise
- Be animated
- Try to think in 20 second sound bites (see below)
- Try timing a speech and see how much information you can put into 20 seconds
- Use voice fluctuation and facial expressions to show interest, involvement, and concern
- Keep to your message
- Editors may cut your response so be definitive for each question
- Pause when reporters interrupt you
- Let the reporter finish, then return to your statement
- If interruptions continue, keep pausing and do not get flustered
- If the reporter is asking several questions let the reporter finish and then state something like "you've asked a number of questions, let me answer your main point first."
- If the reporter gives false premises, correct the false premises or inaccuracies and proceed to answer the main thrust of the questions as best you can
- Be firm on unreleasable material

During an Interview, Never:

- Speculate about why something happened
- Judge the site activities (good/bad, etc.)
- Blame anyone for something happening
- Try to be funny, humor in this situation is not appropriate
- Arrive late to the presentation
- Lie - either you know or don't, can answer or cannot

Always Try to Avoid:

- Pointing with fingers and shouting
- Interrupting others who are speaking
- Dominating the interview - let other speakers have a turn
- Saying "I'm glad you asked that..." It leaves the impression that the presentation is canned and that you were waiting for the question
- Answering too quickly - take some time to think about the question and your answer

before speaking

- Smiling or shaking your head during the presentation
- Large flashy tie clasps, jewelry, cuff links, etc.
- Wearing photo-sensitive glasses and sun glasses - hiding your eyes makes you seem sinister and untrustworthy

Distracting Habits to Avoid:

- Wringing hands
- Rolling or playing with notes
- Jangling money or keys
- Buttoning and unbuttoning coat
- Pulling an ear or a nose
- Fumbling with a pencil
- Putting thumbs under belt
- Standing with hands on hips
- Scratching
- Fussing with ring, watch, or beads
- Fixing tie or pin
- Clutching or straightening clothing
- Cracking knuckles
- Looking at the ceiling or out the window
- Shifting eyes constantly from place to place
- Giving nervous or silly laughs (excessive smiling can also be problem)
- Standing with feet apart or too close together
- Rocking backward and forward from heels to toes
- Standing cross-legged
- Shifting constantly from one foot to the other
- Placing one foot on a chair or table
- Leaning heavily on a lectern or reading stand
- Wetting lips frequently
- Smoothing repeatedly or replacing stray wisps of hair
- Standing with arms crossed or in 'fig leaf' in front
- Pointing, flailing arm movements, folding and unfolding arms - speaking with hands is ok
- Too many "um's" "oh's likes", etc.

Pitfalls and Perils - Look out for these situations during an interview:

- Lead-ins: "Is it true... I have heard..." The reporter may have the wrong information, be trying to confirm a rumor, or just fishing. Correct the misinformation, but do not give away a confidence because you think the reporter may know.
- Speaking for others: "So-n-so said... What did So-n-so mean?" Do not place words in the mouths of others. Send the reporter to that individual for clarification if necessary.
- Run-around. If a reporter is seeking more information than you have, get a name and number and let the reporter know that someone will call.

- Strong denials: If you deny it, be firm. A slighting or hedging denial makes reporters believe that you do not really want to deny the information, and there is more to pursue.
- Using jargon: We get so used to the bureaucratic or scientific terms like “necropsy”, “dispatch or take”, and such, that we forget these terms are not part of everyday language. Use plain language when possible, and if jargon is necessary define the term.
- Repeating a reporter's words: Use the reporter's words only if you want to, but remember, reporters may try to put the words, in your mouth. Reporters like colorful language, but this can lead to error. You know what you want to say, state it the way you want.
- Accepting statistics and names from the media: You have no obligation to accept the media's numbers. If you know for certain that the number is wrong, correct it. If the reporter is right, do not pretend to be ignorant. Acknowledge it and move on to the next question.
- Paraphrasing: This can be trouble and it starts with "so you are saying..." or "what you mean is..." State what you mean, do not just agree to their paraphrase. At times this may take two or three restatements which is usually a sign that the reporter is trying to lead you down another path.
- Off the record: Nothing is off the record. Reporters can and will use it. Say nothing that you do not want to see in print or attributed to you.
- No comment: This raises a flag for reporters and they pursue the issue harder. State why you cannot answer, policy, no information, or need to get back to them.
- Questions you do not understand: Ask the reporter to rephrase if the question does not make sense to you.

Sound Bits and Phrases:

- We want to be fast, effective and thorough
- Public safety is critical
- We are here to protect people and wildlife
- We will be here as long as it takes
- DFG will do what is necessary to get the job done
- DFG will make decisions in the best interests of the people and the environment
- DFG won't leave until we are sure that it is safe
- DFG will work with the state and local authorities to address all concerns
- DFG has its best and most experienced responders on scene
- We're here and we're not leaving, until the job is done
- DFG cares about the community
- DFG wants this done fast, and we want it done right

COMMUNICATIONS CONTACTS

Carrie Wilson at (831) 649-7191 or cwilson@dfg.ca.gov

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