

1.1 Addendum A – Addressing the Media

If you don't communicate immediately, you lose your greatest opportunity to control media events. Your first news release should include at a minimum the who, what, when and where of the situation. (See sample below).

You must give the facts that have been gathered from reliable sources and confirmed. Don't over reach and don't speculate. You must have a prepared statement on hand that can be used to make an initial general response to the media when knowledge about the activity or emergency crisis first becomes known on a widespread basis or by reporters.

As a crisis situation progresses and new information and facts become available, it is also advisable to develop prepared statements to be made by the spokesperson at the onset of any media interview, briefing or news conference.

These prepared statements also can be read over the telephone to reporters who call to request information but are not represented at news conferences or briefings. The statement can also be sent by FAX or e-mail upon request.

Sample News Release

A _____ at _____ involving _____ occurred today at _____ . The incident is under investigation by the local police department and more information is forthcoming.

A (what happened) at (location) involving (who) occurred today at (time). The incident is under investigation and more information is forthcoming.

For instance:

An explosion at 1210 Market Street, the main plant for the Acme Toy Company occurred today at 3 p.m. The incident is under investigation and more information is forthcoming.

Tennessee Department of Education – Media Interview Tips

- **ALWAYS tell the truth.**
 - Never offer a guess or a personal opinion as an answer.
 - Don't exaggerate.
 - Stick to the facts.
 - Stay in your area of expertise.
 - When you don't know, say so, but offer to find out the answer.
 - Avoid saying, "No comment." It looks suspicious, even when there isn't a reason to be.
- **Take your time.**
 - If a reporter calls, get the contact info, deadline, and several general questions. Offer to call back after you've had time to get organized. Reporters can wait a few minutes! Also, speak slowly to reporters so they can jot down your responses correctly and don't be afraid to ask them if you need to repeat anything.
- **Send media calls to the highest appropriate level.**
 - You may be comfortable addressing your own project or activity, however if the reporter asks about System policy feel free to refer the reporter to the Director of Schools.
 - TDOE policy questions may be referred to Rachel Woods, Communications Director, TDOE, 615-253-1960.
- **Stick to the "talking points."**
- **Avoid technical jargon and acronyms. Keep it simple.**
- **Stay cool and calm, even if the reporter isn't.**
 - If the reporter becomes hostile, calmly defer the person to the Director of Schools or Rachel Woods, Communications Director, TDOE for more information. Such behavior is not to be accepted from them and should not be replicated by you. Be helpful. Smile. Be nice.