

# WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

PWS-SG 5

**This summary guide is for National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs) staff who work with the media. It provides advice on how to approach media interviews, how to handle questions and what to do when faced with difficult situations.**



## Understanding the world of the reporter

- Reporters, like meteorologists, work under a great deal of time constraints. They often have to cover a huge range of subjects and need to produce stories quickly.
- Non-science reporters often have a poor understanding of Meteorology.
- Media companies/organizations often give simple weather stories to inexperienced junior reporters who need guidance to understand what they are writing about.
- There is a high turnover of reporters, so you will often be educating new ones, and reiterating previous information to the others.

## **Why is there a need to work with the media?**

The media are the main vehicle to get the perishable information contained in warnings and forecasts to the public. Establishing and maintaining a good working relationship with them helps NMHSs get their message out on time.

## **How can NMHSs develop good working relationships with the media?**

### Sources of comment

- Not all sources of media who comment about the weather are credible and authoritative. Try to always correct misinformation. Accuracy is a common goal for both the reporter as well as the NMHS.

- It is up to you to consistently provide credible and authoritative information for the media.

## Distinguish between facts and opinions

- Some questions seek factual answers (How much rain fell? What's the forecast for the weekend?). These are more likely to be asked by less experienced reporters.
- Some questions seek your opinion about the performance of the NMHS. Unless you have authority to do so, do not answer them. Instead, refer the journalist to senior staff.
- Some questions will be politically sensitive. If such questions are likely, be prepared to stick to the facts, or pass the journalist to the relevant senior NMHS staff.
- Many of these sorts of questions will be asked by more experienced reporters – they will often ask difficult, more focussed questions than junior reporters.

## Have rules

- NMHSs need to establish clear internal protocols for working with the media. Develop official positions on matters of policy and ensure that the staff understand them before talking to the media. Use your most senior staff to handle sensitive media issues.

## When you have finished, stop talking!

- When you have answered a question, the reporter may ask if you have anything more to say. There

is no pressure to add more to a statement than is necessary.

- Talking for the sake of it often results in saying things you did not mean to, which may then lead the reporter to ask questions you do not want to – or simply cannot answer.

### **Dealing with unexpected weather**

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- It is common for the media to have heard about the impacts of a weather event before the NMHS.
- If a reporter calls asking for comment about a situation you were unaware of, stay composed and in control of the situation by:
  - not expressing surprise (even if you are surprised);
  - not getting emotionally involved in the drama of the event; and,
  - asking for details of the event and advising the reporter that someone from your NMHS will contact them at an agreed time. In the meantime, provide what facts you do have.

### **Speak slowly and succinctly**

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- A common urge when answering a reporter's question is to talk too much and too fast. Slow down.
- Sound bites or 'clips' get published – sermons do not.

- Speaking slowly gives you time to choose your words.

- Remember you can ask to "do that again" if you are not comfortable with the answer you have given.

### **You do not have to know everything**

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- Reporters often do not know if a question is easy or hard to answer.
- It is OK not to know the answer. You can refer the question to someone who does know the correct answer, or ask for time to find out.
- Do not provide an instant answer unless you are sure you are right.

### **There is no such thing as 'Off the record'**

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- The interview starts as soon as you start talking and finishes only when the journalist leaves or when you put down the phone.
- Only say what you would be happy to see in print.
- Do not respond if the questioning becomes antagonistic or if the situation becomes hostile in nature. Equally, do not let your guard down. By default, the manner in which you respond reflects the attitude of the NMHS as a whole.
- Finally, remember that the reporter is there to help you tell your part of the story – treat them as your partner, not your foe!

Note: This summary guide is based on the "PWS Guidelines on Weather Broadcasting and the Use of Radio for the Delivery of Weather Information" (WMO/TD No. 1278) - Available at [www.wmo.int/pws](http://www.wmo.int/pws)



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