



**Friends of  
the Earth**

# How to: use the media

**Yesterday we had the modest press officer. Today we have spin doctors – loud, brash, and quick to claim a mystical skill in the dark art of media manipulation. But effective media work isn't hard. Friends of the Earth Media Co-ordinator Ian Wilmore breaks the most sacred rule of the Magic Circle and explains how the trick is done**

If you want to campaign, then media coverage is one of the most effective ways to reach the people you want to hear your message. A local paper is read by thousands. A national TV news programme is watched by millions. The most ardent door-to-door leafleter cannot reach so many in so short a time.

Your job is to supply the media with what it needs – stories, news and personalities – in a way that advances the agenda of Friends of the Earth. Believe me when I tell you that it can be done.

## Find out how your local media works

**Q Which regional and local newspapers, regional TV programmes and local radio stations cover your area?**

**A** Look in commercial media directories such as *PIMS* or *Editors* (try your local library) or ask the Friends of the Earth press office to search its computerised database Mediadisk.

**Q How do you contact them?**

**A** Make up a contact list of media outlets with names of key journalists, telephone and fax numbers and email addresses and update it every few months.

**Q What are their deadlines?**

**A** Every media organisation works to deadlines and you need to know what they are. Your local radio station probably has a morning

news programme from around 7am - 9am and an afternoon one from around 4pm - 6pm. Get the story to them with at least 24 hours' notice if possible. If you are holding a demonstration at an evening council meeting and you want to keep it quiet, embargo your story for a suitable time to make the afternoon/early evening news.

**Q What do I need to know about hacks and the newsdesk?**

**A** Most journalists and media professionals are neither claret-swilling Fleet Street grandees nor grubby drunks in raincoats. They are ordinary working people, usually bright although often ill-informed about your story. The main part of their daily lives is pressure – pressure from editors and producers to find good stories, and pressure to produce them by strict deadlines.

Help the journos cope with that pressure and they will soon be your friends. Make that pressure worse and they may spike your news idea.

Find out who the key people are on your local paper and local news programmes. Ring them and find out what subjects interest them most. If there is a local hack with a strong green interest, it pays to know who they are. Personal contacts are as important in media work as in any other area of business. If media folk know, trust and hopefully like you, you will get more of your stories reported.

All news organisations have a newsdesk or equivalent. This is basically the central processing point for incoming news, including press releases. Consider sending a copy of your release to the newsdesk as well as to named contacts.

## Did you know?

**Newspaper readership is slowly declining but papers are still more significant than the internet and Ceefax. TV news viewing figures have dropped sharply, too, thanks to satellite, cable and increased commercial competition. According to the media agency MarketTiers, people now listen to radio for longer than they watch TV. Audiences for speech radio in particular are rising. Remember, it's not always the newest technology that captures public attention!**

## Types of media

### International media

Consists mainly of broadcast services (eg CNN, BBC World and BBC World Service) and international news agencies (eg Reuters, AP, AFP). Some papers and news magazines have significant international sales (eg *Wall Street Journal*, *International Herald Tribune*, *The Economist*). Internet news sites are often international in reach.

### National (UK) media

Dominated by daily and Sunday papers aimed at distinct groups, usually socio-economic, and to some extent political and cultural. Other key national media outlets include:

- National radio news and current affairs programmes (eg *Radio 4 Today* and *File on Four*, *Radio 5 Drive*, *Radio 1 Newsbeat*, *Independent Radio News*).

- National TV news and current affairs (eg BBC main news, Sky News, ITN, *Panorama*).

- Trade press (eg *Construction News*, *Computer Weekly*, *Bird Life*).

- Consumer and lifestyle magazines (eg *Woman's Own*, *FHM*, *Budgerigar Monthly*).

- Agencies, particularly the Press Association (PA), which send on their news coverage to other media outlets. In the case of the PA, this is done on a rolling 24-hours, seven days-a-week basis.

- Internet and Ceefax (the latter being an increasingly important news source for people "too busy" to read a newspaper).

### Regional media

There is a network of TV news centres with their own nightly programmes, and a large number of local radio stations. Every city and large town has at least one

daily paper and often a morning and evening edition or separate publication. Wales and Northern Ireland have their own media including TV news and daily newspapers.

### Local media

Essential to successful campaigning. Small towns, city districts and rural areas will generally have at least one priced weekly local paper, and possibly a number of free sheets delivered directly to the door. Local papers (and regional and local radio and TV) also cut across social groups because they go through every neighbourhood door, regardless of age, income, education or politics. Local media also tend to be read, watched or listened to with more attention and to stick in people's minds better than national media stories.

# Tell me more about news

**The media wants news. It helps if your 'news' is in fact new (although politicians get very good at dressing last month's announcement in new clothes). It may also be helpful to include human interest, controversy, local personalities and provide picture pointers.**

### Human interest

That planned incinerator will not just emit 4.37 tonnes of some unpronounceable chemical. It will also threaten cute six-year-old Josephine when she walks past it on her way to her primary school, as well as her photogenic granny who walks with her.

### Controversy

"Anytown Council Leader Rod Foodbotham was slammed by local greens yesterday..."  
Rows are often news.

### Pictures

The newspaper can take a photo of little Josephine as she wheezes her way to school. It cannot photograph the 4.37 tonnes of unpronounceable chemical that happens to be a colourless gas.

### Being contacted

Make sure you can be contacted, particularly if your name appears on a press release. If possible, give them a home and work number, and/or a pager/mobile phone number. If you get a media message on your answerphone return it promptly. There is nothing more frustrating for a hack than to be unable to contact key sources before deadline.

# Breaking news

Media organisations get their news from many sources, including news agencies, forward news planners, and the courts. But a key source is press releases. Media outlets get hundreds or even thousands of press releases: most go onto the dreaded “spike” and are never seen by a living soul again. Friends of the Earth press releases must avoid this terrible fate...

## The press release

### Stage 1: writing


Make up a good press release template which you can use time and time again. Use headed paper and number the pages. Use Friends of the Earth’s logo and the name of your group. Use the words “Press Release” in large writing. Put the page number on each page of your release, in bold and in the form “Page N of X”. Press releases should be one side of A4 for preference, and two sides maximum.

**Picture ops** if appropriate, include a separate box paragraph near the top of the release offering a picture opportunity, to encourage local papers and TV to send cameras

**Put all the main facts in the first paragraph** or even better the first sentence. If you want to know how to do this, read the news stories in any reasonable newspaper. You will find that the first paragraph is a concise summary of the whole story, and sets out WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN and WHY (the so-called 5xWs of journalism). Friends of the Earth has a reputation for accuracy that we must all maintain.

## Press Release

Embargo: 00:001 Wednesday 15 May 2002  
Page 1 of 1



**Pesticide company’s legal bid to keep toxic secrets**

**PHOTO CALL**  
Time: 10:30 am, Wednesday 15 May 2002 Where: outside the High Court, the Strand, London.  
Campaigners dressed in chemical suits and pollution masks and carrying chemical spray packs marked ‘top secret’ will be outside the High Court on Wednesday. They will be protesting against chemical company Aventis’ attempt to keep safety data on one of its pesticides secret.

The High Court in London will today (Wednesday) hear a legal bid from the biotech industry to stop the Government releasing pesticide safety data to Friends of the Earth. The environmental campaigners are concerned about the dangers posed by Glufosinate Ammonium, and in particular that the weed killer, known to have toxic effects on animals and microorganisms, might find its way into surface or ground water.

The judicial review is being brought jointly by biotech company Aventis, and pesticides industry trade association, the Crop Protection Association. The case was brought after Friends of the Earth asked the UK Government in 2000 for safety information relating to the weedkiller Glufosinate Ammonium. The information was supplied to the Government by Aventis to back its application for the chemical to be sprayed on winter trials of its GM oilseed rape. Use of the chemical had previously been banned during winter months because government advisors were worried about its potential to wash from the soil in heavier winter rains.

Friends of the Earth’s Legal Advisor Phil Michaels said:  
*“People have a right to know about the possible effects of chemicals being sprayed on their food and used in their homes. But the chemical industry doesn’t believe in openness and has gone to the courts to try and force the Government to keep the safety data secret. This is an important case which could lift the cloak of secrecy that has surrounded pesticide approvals for decades.”*

Contact: Pete Riley 07654 588850 (pgr) Press Office 020 7566 1649  
Friends of the Earth 26-28 Underwood Street London N1 7JQ

**Give key details** put the date and time of publication of your release at the top. Either mark a press release “For Immediate Use”, followed by that day’s date – which means it can be used at once, or “Embargo” for a specific time and date – which means that it cannot be used until then.

**Include an interesting quote** from a campaigner written in spoken English. This should be clearly indented or written in italics or both.

**Contacts** Double check contact details at the bottom of each page of the release. Make sure that the contacts can be contacted day or night.

### Stage 2: sending your press release

Send your press release by both fax and email, and even by post when appropriate. The more ways you send it, the more chance there is that someone appropriate (ie the newsdesk) will read it.

### Stage 3: follow-up

Your brilliant press release has gone to all your contacts. Now you need to follow it up. You must ring all your

contacts to make sure they have received the release, and to ask if there is anything else they wish to know. Media organisations are chaotic, and things get lost. When the newsdesk says “Never seen it before”, they may even be telling the truth. Send it again.

How to...Pull-out section

# Interviews

**Your release has inspired requests for both radio and TV interviews. This may seem daunting but with practice (and you can do trial runs at home using a handheld video camera, tape machine or simply into the mirror) your confidence will grow**

## Television interviews

Recorded TV interviews (by far the most common kind) tend to be very short – they may use a clip as short as ten to 20 seconds. So be brief and incisive with your answers. While the camera operator is setting up the equipment, ask the reporter any questions you want answers to – for example, what will your first question be? Look at and talk to the reporter, not the camera. If eye contact makes you nervous, fix your gaze two inches over the interviewer's head. If you stumble with your answer in a RECORDED interview, stop and ask for the question to be put to you again.

### Four tricks for success

- 1 Appear relaxed, confident, and friendly in your body language. The appearance of confidence creates confidence.
- 2 Try to suggest a good spot in your building or pick an interesting backdrop for the interview.
- 3 Eccentricities of dress or behaviour will distract the viewer. Always look tidy and 'ready' for the interview.
- 4 Try not to fidget, sway or rock from foot to foot.

**Say what you mean, but avoid jargon: Jargon can be defined as any words or concepts understood only by a particular community. For example, green activists know what is meant by "sustainable development". Most other people don't.**

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## Remember

- You are a campaigner because you care about the issues. Make sure your TV and radio audiences understand this.
- Be truthful, be helpful, and be precise. But there's no need to be solemn. A good joke may be worth a hundred statistics. Trouble-making should be fun!

## Radio interviews

Radio interviews are generally short. You may get three minutes or so for the complete interview, enough time to make maybe two main points. Decide what these points are before you do the interview. Find out if the interview is live or taped. It can be either and this will help you decide how prepared you need to be.

Remember who your audience is for radio interviews. It will be difficult for them to capture every word you say while they are driving in their car or busy at home with their kids. Speak clearly and avoid complicated language that would be difficult for the radio show's audience to understand. Do not use jargon. Use simple words to paint a picture and express feeling. You are a campaigner because you care about the issues. Make sure the audience understands this.

If you stumble with your answer in a RECORDED interview, stop and ask for the question to be put to you again. In a LIVE interview, keep talking or – in exceptional circumstances – ask for the question to be put again. Remember, anything you say can end up on the air. So if you do not want it repeated, don't say it.

