

Media contacts

- ♦ www.radio-now.co.uk/main.htm for details of all radio stations
- ♦ www.mediauk.com for details of radio, TV and print media outlets
- ♦ www.newspapersoc.org.uk, www.newspapersoc.org.uk/ISBA-maps/daily-maps.htm for details of your local newspapers

You can also find contacts for many local newspapers at:

- ♦ www.planningsanity.co.uk/media/news.htm

Alternative media

Don't forget to let 'our' media know! Post your stories on:
Earth First: www.earthfirst.org.uk
Indymedia: www.indymedia.org.uk
Schnews: www.schnews.org.uk

Want to find out more?

If you want to find out more about dealing with the media (including how the media works and dealing with unwanted media attention) look at our longer briefing on *Dealing with the Media* which is available on our website.

For more briefings and training workshops see:
www.seedsforchange.org.uk



Dealing with the Media

short guide



First things first!

So you're thinking about working with the media – or they may already be contacting you. Before starting to write your news releases and preparing for interviews you should consider some basic questions:

In this guide:

- ★ writing news releases
- ★ radio and TV interviews
- ★ media and direct action
and much more...

1) What's the aim of your action?

If the main purpose of your action isn't to interest the media then don't bother spending lots of time on media work! On the other hand if you want media coverage then you'll save yourself loads of hassle if you think a bit about which media to target, and how.

Even if you're not expecting media coverage of your actions it's still worth preparing a news release (short summary of your action with your key messages) just in case any journalists turn up. You're a bit more likely to get your message across if you give the journalists your side of the story.

2) What's your angle?

How are you going to portray who you are and what you're doing? Does your media angle fit into the wider aims of the campaign?

3) Who will talk to the media?

Work this out beforehand so that the person has a chance to prepare some sound-bites and revise the basic facts. The perfect person for the job is friendly, confident, able to be firm and good with words.



The media usually make a beeline to those doing the interesting things (like sitting on a big yellow machine, or up a tree) so you should know who is happy (and able) to talk to the media and point reporters in the right direction.

Which media? Any media?

Local newspapers and radio often cover anything that is even just a little bit offbeat. TV is more choosy, and you'll need to come up with something fairly big to get them interested. It's even more difficult to get national media interested (but easier if you're doing your action in London).

Think about which media you want to attract (*local, regional, national – press, radio, TV?*) and then develop your media strategy. Ask yourself:

What message do you want the media to use? Focus on two or three simple key messages to ensure that the public remember them.

Is your action sexy, controversial, or current enough to be interesting to the national media? Or is it only going to attract local and independent media? Look at similar stories that national media have run in the past – is yours as exciting as those? If your action relates to other news headlines (e.g. taxes on SUVs) draw attention to this in your news release.

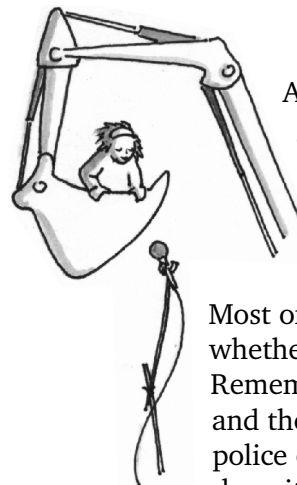
Are there going to be colourful, dynamic images? Photographers and TV will only bother to turn up if you're offering good visuals.

Do you know which journalists to contact directly? Ask other activists which journalists are friendly and likely to do a positive write up – try these first.

Do you know where to send your news releases? Make an up-to-date list of email addresses and telephone numbers of your selected media. You can look up their email addresses on the web or ring them up and ask for them.



Media and direct action



Actions often rely on secrecy in order to achieve their goals. But how do you make sure the media will be there without giving them all the details? If a reporter already knows you do interesting actions then she/he may be willing to be on stand-by without knowing exactly what may happen.

Most of the time we just have to make a decision on whether or not it's too risky to tell the media in advance. Remember: it's the media's job to get different viewpoints, and they may well pass on details of your action to the police or to the target of your action before you've even done it.

If you don't want to risk telling the media before the action then you can either take a media contact list to the action and phone them when you get there, or you can have

Top Tip:

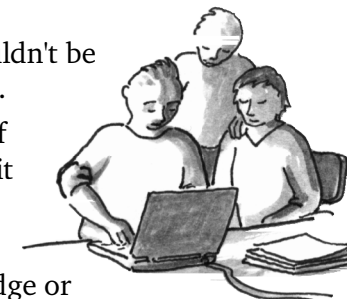
Writing "EMBARGOED UNTIL (TIME)" at the top of the news release won't guarantee the media will respect your security.

someone in an office to send out news releases for you when you give them the signal (but make sure they don't send out the releases before you tell them to – all sorts of things can go wrong!)

Using the letters page

Letters to the press can be an effective way of getting your message out to people, particularly local papers where they have a good chance of being published.

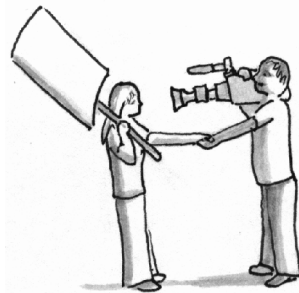
- ★ Keep letters short and to the point. They shouldn't be a big rant, but come over as being reasonable.
- ★ Focus on getting a few points across clearly. If you have lots of points to make you could split them between different letter writers.
- ★ Letters are more likely to be published if they contain personal or professional knowledge or experience – so mention these.



Radio and TV interviews

For radio or TV interviews there are a few extra things for you to bear in mind:

- ★ **Ask whether the interview is live or recorded** – if it's recorded you may be able to have another go if you mess things up.
- ★ **Speak clearly and more slowly** than usual.
- ★ **Vary your tone** – it needs to match your message. Let your natural enthusiasm come across – it's one of your main strengths!
- ★ **Talk to the interviewer and make eye contact** with them, try to ignore the microphone and camera.
- ★ They may only use a really short clip from the interview – maybe just four or five seconds, so **make sure you get some sound bites in** – snappy phrases that cover your two to three main points.



Using your own pictures and video footage

If you have the skills and equipment you can post your own pictures and videos of the action on your website for the media to use. You'll have to make sure that:

- ★ they are of high quality (look good, and at least 300dpi for stills);
- ★ available immediately – ideally while the action is still going on;
- ★ they are in the right format – check beforehand what formats the media need.

Remember to check photos and footage for anything dodgy (eg: may look bad if shown out of context by the media, or be of use to the police).

How to write a news release



Journalists are snowed under by news releases – make sure yours stands out:

- ✓ Check out the deadlines for newspapers in your area.
- ✓ **Send your news release by email**, or if you print it out **use A4 paper, typed**. Put your group's name (and logo) along with the words NEWS RELEASE at the top.
- ✓ **Keep it short and simple** – one page only.
- ✓ **Make up a good headline** – short and concise.
- ✓ Put the **news angle in the first couple of lines**. Cover the 5 big points: **WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY**. E.g.: (*who:*) Local people (*when:*) today (*what:*) took action (*where:*) in the town centre to (*why:*) cut climate changing emissions.
- ✓ Look at articles in local papers and **write your news release in a similar way**. Local papers often print news releases with only one or two changes.
- ✓ **It's not a rant!** Focus on the facts most relevant to your action. If you need to add more detail put it at the end as “Notes for the Editor”.
- ✓ **Add a snappy quote or two**, e.g.: somebody famous saying “GM is dangerous and the public don't want it” followed by somebody involved in the action explaining what you're doing and why.
- ✓ Write a short paragraph with **background to your group or campaign**.
- ✓ **Include contact numbers** on the release – make sure phones are working, and that the person answering the phone is prepared.
- ✓ **Add details of picture opportunities** – put in a time and place along with a short, visual and enticing description of what will happen.
- ✓ Follow up your news release with a phone call: “just wanted to check our news release arrived”.

Sample news release

Work stopped at open cast coal mine site

For immediate release: **date** **www.leaveitintheground.org.uk**
On-site mobile: 0712345678 Stills/footage: 0712345678

Today activists from Earth First! (1) halted continuing destruction of countryside at Shipley (Derbyshire) by UK Coal. The action is part of an ongoing campaign against UK Coal's plans to open cast mine 1 million tonnes of coal from the site over the next five years. This will release an additional 3.5 million tonnes of Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) into the atmosphere over this period.

Protesters entered the site around 1pm and brought work to an end whilst they peacefully occupied machinery. They intend to stay for as long as possible.

Climate change is the biggest threat facing us, and burning coal is the biggest historical cause of climate change. This year electricity generator's demand for coal was 3% higher than last year's. (2)

Jim Hansen, director of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies and eminent climate scientist, wrote in a letter (3) to Gordon Brown "The single greatest threat to the climate comes from burning coal. Coal-fired generation is historically responsible for most of the CO₂ in the air today – responsible for about half of all CO₂ emissions globally".

Dave Porter, a protester at the site said "All over the country groups are emerging as part of a growing, international movement defending communities and the climate from new coal. We're faced with a system that's not listening to the people – a system that disregards the science in the face of the single biggest threat to our planet. If the government won't save the country then it's down to all of us to take action! More and more people across the country are pledging to continue resistance to all developments of the UK coal industry."

Notes to the editor

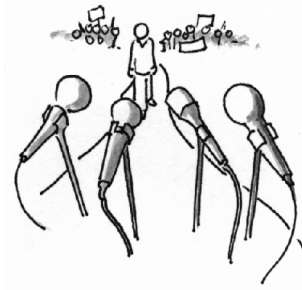
(1) Earth First! Is a network of campaigns using direct action to confront, stop and eventually reverse the forces responsible for the destruction of the Earth and its inhabitants. EF! is not a cohesive group or campaign, but a banner for people who share similar philosophies to work under.

In June 2008, activists squatted an abandoned farm house on the planned opencast site near Shipley in Derbyshire. The farm was about to be demolished and work was held up for several weeks until the eviction which lasted for nine days in August.

Today's action follows a mass trespass at the site on Saturday 25th October 2008, when people from around the country gathered at the site in Derbyshire to show the strength of opposition to plans for developments in the coal industry.

(2) Statistics from the Government's bulletin of statistics on energy in the United Kingdom.

(3) Jim Hansen is the director of NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies and renowned climate scientist. He wrote an open letter to Gordon Brown on the 19th December 2007 calling on him to lead the way with renewable technologies and not renew coal. More recently he has given evidence to the crown court in defence of six Greenpeace activist who were found not guilty of causing criminal damage at Kingsnorth coal Power station in Kent.



Interviews

Being interviewed doesn't have to be a nerve-racking experience. You have a much better chance of a good write up if you're well prepared, and if you make sure the media speak to people who know what they're talking about. The best way of doing that is to offer them selected interviewees.

Interviews with newspaper reporters are usually more relaxed and slower than with the radio or TV, but the same principles apply:

- ★ **Know your facts** – make some notes, and read them before your interview. Then take a deep breath, and relax.
- ★ **Know your audience** – you can go into some detail for Radio 4, but if it's the local pop music station you'll need to restrict yourself to seriously snappy sound-bites.
- ★ **Decide on two or three key messages.** Keep these in mind, and stick to them, e.g.: Climate Chaos is happening; we all need to take responsibility; the action target is a climate criminal because...
- ★ **Think about what questions you may be asked** and how you can answer them.
- ★ **Paint a picture, tell a story** – avoid statistics and long lists. People understand polar bears better than friction factors of polar ice-sheets.
- ★ **Avoid jargon or technical language** – speak clearly, and simply. **Don't bore with statistics** – say "almost half", not 46%.
- ★ **If you don't understand a question, ask the journalist to repeat or explain it.** Do not get drawn into topics you know nothing about – you have good reasons to take action, feel free to remind the interviewer of what they are!