

Turney's Tips

Media alerts and advisories

Underlying assumptions:

Media alerts or media advisories most often call the news media's attention to upcoming events, news conferences, meetings, or other happenings the media might like to have a reporter attend and report about. Others let the media know about the availability of a prominent person or an authoritative expert as a potential interview subject.

Private organizations issue media alerts as a voluntary and optional public relations tactic, and most do so infrequently. In contrast, government agencies and some government-regulated organizations routinely and frequently issue media alerts—sometimes several per week—because they're required to do so by law.

The media themselves, not their readers, listeners, or viewers, are the primary audience for media alerts. They are not intended to be passed on to the public in their original form.

Once an alert is given to the media, the public relations person who issued it has no control over how—or even if—it will be used by the media. Whatever is added to it or deleted from it, or if it's discarded unused, is solely up to the editors.

Working tips:

- ▶ Listing a meeting or an event's date, time, and place usually fulfills the primary purpose of an alert. Some practitioners add a few additional sentences to explain its significance and serve as a "mini-release" that could be used by the media as a filler item.
- ▶ Issue a separate advisory for each separate event, especially if the alert is mandated. Complex situations—e.g., a day-long festival—may require a master list of everything that's happening and a series of one event per page alerts packaged in a folder.
- ▶ Advisories required by law or administrative regulation—e.g., agendas of government policy making bodies or a Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) disclosure—must fully meet the applicable legal requirements for such information as inspection rights, amount of advance notice, availability of additional information, and funding sources.
- ▶ Unless more time is required by law, media request, or habitual practice, media alerts should be timed to be in the hands of local media 4-5 working days before the event.
- ▶ When issuing a mandated alert, all media should get **exactly the same** alert to avoid legal problems. However, if you believe certain media may have a particular interest or you want to suggest a special coverage angle to them, you can call or attach a note to that effect to the alerts given to them.

For additional information:

David Yale, *The Publicity Handbook*, especially Chapter 4 Writing for the Press;
NTC Business Books: Lincolnwood, Illinois; 1993.

Format and organization:

- Specially printed media alert paper is an attention-getter and can also be cited as evidence of your organization's sincere effort to be responsive if it's mandated to issue alerts.
- Headings such as **public meeting announcement**, **photo opportunity**, or **news conference invitation** quickly identify the type of alert.

- The date at the top of the page is when the alert is issued, not the date of the event being announced.
- A centered, non-narrative listing should summarize everything a reporter would need to know to get to the event if she/he were assigned to cover it. If press credentials or advance registration are required for admission that needs to be very clearly and prominently explained.
- Using - 30 - or - [end] - or # # # to denote the end of a story is a journalism tradition many public relations professionals have adopted. Anything below it on the page is understood to be reference or follow up information provided to assist the media.

<p style="text-align: center;">PUBLIC MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT date of alert</p> <p style="text-align: center;">name or description of the event date and time of event location</p> <p style="text-align: center;">identification of the event's sponsor</p> <p>A few sentences of narrative explanation about the event or its importance may be included if desired. If such information is provided, double-space it and follow AP style guidelines.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- [end] -</p> <p>For additional information: name of contact contact's title daytime phone and home phone</p>
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- A contact is someone the media can contact for additional information. He or she must be able to authoritatively and quickly answer questions about what will be happening and make any special arrangements the media needs to cover the story. The "title" listed after a contact's name needs to establish his or her credibility as a subject matter expert and may be more of a job description rather than an actual job title.
- Phone number(s) should provide 24-hour, 7-day per week access to contacts. A second-rate contact who is readily available is preferable to a star-quality contact who is not accessible.
- Electronically-distributed alerts need to have at least as much identification as a letterhead would—organization name, address and phone number. Do not send electronic and hard-copies to the same person unless they have specifically asked for them.