



# GETTING YOUR MESSAGE ACROSS



World  
Meteorological  
Organization

Weather • Climate • Water

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Media Guide for WMO Information and  
Public Affairs Focal Points at National Meteorological and  
Hydrological Services

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# FOREWORD

With heightened awareness and growing international concern over climate change and increasing incidence of extreme weather events affecting the daily lives of millions of people, WMO and its 188 Member National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHS) must ensure that the broader public is informed as quickly, accurately and effectively as possible. A key component of an outreach strategy is enhancing effective working relations with the media, with a view, on the one hand, to deepening public understanding of the various phenomena at work, and on the other, being able to respond authoritatively and in a timely manner to queries raised by the public and media.

This “Media Guide” is designed as a working tool for WMO Information and Public Affairs focal points within NMHS to achieve the above objectives and facilitate their work of getting the weather, climate and water message out to the public at large.

This guide refers to basic concepts and approaches in dealing with the media, whether through one-on-one interviews, press conferences or briefings or by disseminating “news” via press releases or other means of communication, including the Internet. It is not aimed solely at media presenting forecasts, but also at reporters, editors and broadcast producers who cover general news and feature stories that are impacted by climate- and weather-related events. Relations with the media must be constantly nurtured. This is why it is also designed to help NMHS assist journalists who may not necessarily have the required expertise in meteorological and hydrological matters in getting the message across.

Major advances in communications technology have made the job of public outreach easier. At the same time, increasing pressure is placed on WMO and its Members to produce “real time” responses, requiring the cooperation of all our partners, including meteorological and hydrological experts and relevant national and international authorities with a stake on spreading awareness about the climate, weather and water resources. Such cooperation is fundamental to public awareness and to the success of our public information and communication activities.

This publication includes references to a host of WMO communications materials that provide detailed guidance on various fields where NHMS and the media have mutual interests. It also complements the WMO Global Communications Strategy.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Jarraud', is written over a vertical line that is part of a larger, stylized signature or mark.

**M. Jarraud**  
**Secretary-General**

# 1 WHY COMMUNICATE?

What are you trying to say to promote your work, and why must you tell journalists about it? Then how do you inform the press in a way that is both interesting and useful? It is not just a matter of writing a press release and expecting the world to learn instantly what you want to impart. The first step should be thinking carefully about what you want to say, and then how to best say it, and when.

Do you want to educate school children about climate change, or inform the wider public about weather forecasts or storm alerts? Do you need to draw the attention of decision-makers to the urgent need for investment in climate prediction? Do you want to educate farmers, industry and other sectors about proper use of forecasts for sustainable economic activities?

You need to know what you want to report and where to target it. Deciding what it is you want to say, and then to whom, are fundamental first steps before producing a press release, staging a press conference, arranging interviews or organizing a special event. Doing so will make it easier for you to start with your promotional activities and building interest around your work.

The increasing global concern around climate change has made your task a bit easier. The science behind weather, climate and water receives more popular recognition now than ever before, in large part due to the tireless work of thousands of scientists and numerous organizations, both national and international. Adding to this has been the recognition awarded to the WMO/UNEP Intergovernmental Panel on Climate

## WMO CLIMATE MESSAGES

The more we learn about our future climate, the better we can prepare. To enhance our knowledge, we need to invest in climate monitoring and prediction. Gaps in observations must be filled in order to provide communities with the climate information required for mitigation and adaptation.

There is an urgent need for strong collaborative mechanisms to meet developing countries' observational requirements for improving early warnings against extreme weather, and to upgrade the quality and efficiency of their climate risk management practices.

The sustainability and efficiency of socio-economic decisions will increasingly be determined by the integration of climate science. Well-informed, science-based decision-making will save lives and avoid economic setbacks.

Change, joint-winner with Albert A. Al Gore Jr., of the Nobel Peace Prize of 2007 for “their efforts to build up and disseminate greater knowledge about man-made climate change and to lay the foundations for the measures that are needed to counteract such change”.

Climate change is a major news issue and there is great demand for stories on all issues surrounding the problem. Countless blogs,



## CORE MESSAGES – WMO AND NMHS ARE CRUCIAL FOR:

- Saving lives and property from natural hazards.
- Managing disaster risks.
- Protecting livelihoods and improving quality of life.
- Achieving sustainable socio-economic development.
- Managing climate risks to avoid economic setbacks.
- Fostering effective solutions to nature-based challenges faced by people every day and everywhere.

environmental news services and websites follow every development in the climate change story.

Once you have worked out what it is you want to say, then it is time to decide how to publicize this message and when. The sections that follow in this manual aim at providing a guide to crafting your message and avoiding pitfalls.

## 2 WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

The weather is the “part of the local news broadcast more people watch than any other,” according to an article published in The New York Times on 18 February 1996. “And they watch it as if their lives depended on it, which in some cases they do.”

No journalist likes to be ignored, nor brushed off. They, instead, want to be informed, to produce good stories, and to get the message out to the very people who you are trying to help. In this age of the 24-hour news cycle, getting your work publicized has never been easier. Why you ask?

In most cases, journalists are working on specific weather and climatic stories of the day, where all they need are cogent, direct responses to a select few questions. There are occasions when specialist reporters may ask more probing questions. This too can be immensely valuable to your NMHS by providing an opportunity to have information about your achievements and projects released in detail.

Either way, talking to journalists and meeting their needs are vital tasks that cannot be underrated. The power of the media must too be harnessed to meet the needs of a public with an insatiable appetite for information on weather. Flood and cyclone warnings can save untold lives, seasonal forecasts help farmers plant the right crops, allow governments to make the best use of water, and help travellers decide where they should holiday to. Weather, climate and water have major economic and geopolitical consequences. Hurricanes threaten oil fields. Prolonged cold weather increases need for energy. Both examples impact directly on people and their incomes. Such examples are staple products for the news industry.

Good media relations are rooted in availability and trust. Journalists need immediate and unimpeded access to information sources and to be able to rely on the veracity of that information.

Like you, reporters are busy and work against the clock. Similarly, they want to get the news out. A fast-breaking story, like the development of a tropical cyclone, needs timely and accurate updates. The journalist is there to help you get your updates seen, read and heard by as many people as possible.

Reporters covering a weather story for the first time may be unfamiliar with technical terms. So a brief explanation can ensure accuracy and understanding. Whenever possible, technical and ambiguous terminology should be avoided as it might be misinterpreted or misunderstood.

An invaluable asset to any print or television story is visual aid. Photographs, films, maps, graphs and diagrams are always sought by editors and television producers.

Though friendly relations with the media are vital, a word of caution is necessary. A reporter is a reporter 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Confidential material may not be the everyday subject of weather forecasting, but sensitive matters may arise in all organizations and off-guard remarks could become news, either big or small. Something said in confidence, or “off-the-record”, could conceivably be material for a story at some other time.



There are several ways of working with the media. All point to a specific situation or need — yours and theirs. You will sometimes ask yourself: “Should I hold a press conference or issue a press release?” The answer may be both. The following sections answer those questions and others.



# 3 TELEVISION AND RADIO

Radio and television in many markets are the main vehicle to receive information. Television brings vivid images and crucial information directly into millions of homes. And in low-resource settings, where Internet connectivity is poor or non-existent, illiteracy is high and televisions are expensive, the radio provides an essential source of information to local communities and is a vital link to regional centres, capitals and the outside world.

Radio networks are effective channels for communicating weather information. Some countries have dedicated weather radio systems providing round-the-clock information, issuing severe weather warnings via receivers equipped with alarm systems. Radio is an essential component of early warning systems that issue cyclone alerts, saving lives.

## Key pointers for taped interviews

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- Speaking with a “conversational” style, as it is attractive and persuasive;
- Avoid pitching your voice too high and dropping your voice to a mumble;
- Enunciate without losing your normal manner of speech. Avoid barking information and, remember to take a breath.

Technical pitfalls include bumping the microphone attached to your jacket on television or failing to remain “on” the radio microphone.

## **Different forms of broadcast interviews**

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- Formal one-on-ones in a studio or at your offices;
- Panel appearances with two or three other participants;
- Stand-ups outside a conference room, in the street or in other ad-hoc locations;
- Remotes with the interviewer in one location and the interviewee in another.

For interview guidelines, go to Chapter 8, “Conducting Interviews.”

# 4 PRESENTING WEATHER INFORMATION FOR BROADCAST

Weather affects our professional activities, our health, leisure time, our travel plans and other decisions in our daily lives. TV makes faraway events seem closer: the public perceives that weather conditions affecting a certain region or country could reach their own immediate environment. The following information on presenting weather information for broadcast could come in handy for training and workshops aimed at improved broadcasting services.

The actual presentation of a live weather forecast entails a little over two hours' work. Although each weather presenter on each channel has an individual image and style, the presenter's work should comprise the "10 Steps to Broadcast Meteorology." (See box on pages 14/15)

## **Evolution of broadcast weather forecasting**

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In many developing countries, NMHS provide TV weather presentations. WMO has been addressing the style of presentation to help ensure it is produced and disseminated in as clear, effective and interesting a form as possible.

Viewers need basic information, not a lecture on meteorology. Will it rain? Will the sun shine? Will it be cold? At the same time, television is an effective teaching tool, which weather presenters can use to explain weather information by incorporating slightly more technical material into presentations.

## 10 STEPS FOR BROADCAST METEOROLOGISTS

- 1: **Candidate Selection:** Potential weather forecasters need good scientific, presentation and communication skills.
- 2: **Auditions:** Auditions should be given to candidates who have shown competence in weather forecasting.
- 3: **One Minute Studio Test:** This is a useful guide for deciding if the potential broadcaster has the necessary personality and subject knowledge to succeed.
- 4: **Briefing and Story of the Day:** Based on advice from the local Met Office, the broadcaster must emphasize the main weather story of the day and answer essential questions for the public.
- 5: **Editorialising the Weather Story:** Translating complex meteorological language into a form that viewers and listeners can understand and benefit from.
- 6: **Making the Graphics:** Well-chosen images and charts are needed to logically reinforce verbal messages. Graphics with no bearing on the message should not be used.



- 7: Rehearsing: This is crucial to ensure the weather programme runs smoothly and clearly. Graphics, ideally, should be used during rehearsals.
- 8: Make the Studio Work for You: Become completely familiar with the studio and everything and everybody in it, making sure the camera is the correct distance away from you and that you can see the prompt monitor which is correctly positioned.
- 9: Radio Scripts: Be careful when writing a radio script so it sounds like you are telling a story, not reading from a text.
- 10: Constant Review: Self-criticism and analysis is important for ensuring your weather broadcast is effective and providing a public service.

Adapted from the WMO video, "10 Steps to Broadcast Meteorology"

There are two main types of weather reports:

- One produced and presented by a broadcast meteorologist; and
- The other presented by a journalist or media personality.

Both oblige inexperienced presenters to learn a new field:

- Meteorologists must learn about journalism and television so the information they prepare meets the needs of viewers and network managers; and
- Journalists covering meteorology must know the subject well enough to understand the meteorological analyses they deal with.

In some countries, the weather forecast is not a programme in itself. The meteorologist hands the text to the newscaster, who reads it on the air to viewers. In other countries, broadcast meteorologists take an active role and appear before the camera.

During radio broadcasts, information was initially read by “speakers”. Then managers began to realize that radio broadcasts needed livening up. This led some radio stations to seek out media personalities for their voice.

Similar developments occurred in TV. The rapid evolution of this medium has prompted communication experts to change the image

of live broadcasts, while relying on NMHS for providing the meteorological information.

All these developments have made the weather report more effective by making the information more accessible to the public. Now, weather reports link viewers in all countries to a popularized science.

Many channels are producing a more sober, yet informal, weather presentation. They are perfecting graphics and researching developments in weather reporting. The weather bulletin on these channels is personalized by a weather presenter, who, in turn, becomes the image of the bulletin and of the channel.

With today's explosive expansion of the world's audiovisual landscape, televised weather reports are now "big business." Previously, weather reports in many countries were included as a buffer at the end of the news. Now, weather reports often are programmes in themselves.

### **Developments in audiovisual technology and specialized networks**

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Audiovisual deregulation, new technology, information highways and access to inexpensive broadcasting time have changed audiovisual landscapes. The explosive growth in satellite and cable communications across the developed world, and parts of the developing world, has resulted in the creation of specialized networks, including weather channels.

The most important factors in the weather report are:

- Increasingly frequent information inputs;
- Personalized presentation;
- Constant improvement of graphics to make presentations clearer and more educational.

The weather report and the weather presenter are an indispensable feature of television. The presenters represent the human touch and bring knowledge and a view of the outside world to bear.



## 5 PRINT MEDIA

Print media ranges from publications like newspapers, related websites and magazines to news agencies and serve an important function in educating and informing the public about the weather, climate and water.

Many newspapers, as well as their websites, feature daily “Weather Pages” that use information provided by NMHS and package it in an attractive and easy-to-read manner, often in the case of websites, using interactive graphics and diagrams.

There are several major international news agencies, where targeted information regarding weather can be directed towards. They are quick to report breaking news and also write longer, more in-depth pieces that have a flexible time element. Having news agencies cover your news or weather events in your region guarantees wide exposure, as newspapers, magazines, radio, television and Internet outlets rely heavily on wire services for stories and information.

Many countries also have their national news agency, which domestic media rely on for news, including related to the weather.

An avenue in the print media for getting your message across is through a “Letter to the Editor.” This offers you the opportunity to spread a message important to your organization in your own terms. Different to a news article, the letter is in your voice and it can be used for any number of means: to promote a project, praise a development, to rebut criticism. The publication in question reserves the right to use the letter or not and, often, to edit it.

# 6 INTERNET AND WEBSITES

The ever-increasing use of the Internet makes it one of the most important and valuable information mediums available to WMO and NMHS. Internet browsing, websites, e-mail and blogs are basic tools for journalists seeking information about weather, climate and water stories.

The value of a strong web presence through your Internet site cannot be stressed enough, and trying to make it essential for journalists to use is vital. Your website's home page is the gateway to the world and can either make or break your site. Points to consider include:

- Simple, clean, uncluttered formats and typefaces work best;
- Make sure the news section is easy to find and constantly updated;
- Internet news writing has its own style, partly because reading from computer screens is slower and more uncomfortable than reading from paper. Here are a few points to remember:
  - Keep headline short and include all main points (who, what, when, where, how, why) in the first paragraph;
  - Stick to one idea per paragraph; don't use large blocks of text;
  - Write as actively (subject-verb-object) and concisely as possible;

- Keep page length short;
- Web users tend to scan rather than read, so highlight important points of your piece and add useful links to selected words or phrases.
- Provide print-friendly version if possible;
- Establish website links with WMO and as many partner organizations as possible;
- Make sure your website URL is added to all publications, communications and letterheads.

# 7 TOOLS FOR GETTING YOUR MESSAGE ACROSS

There are numerous tools you can use to promote your organization's work, such as press releases, press conferences, one-on-one interviews, special events, using WMO's services. This following section takes a look at each of these tools, and others.

## Press conferences

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The basic rule for press conferences is to have something significant to announce and somebody significant to announce it. Journalists need something interesting (and ideally NEW) to write about and a named source, ideally the head of your organization or an expert, to quote.

### Key elements of an ideal news conference

- *Topic:* Concise and clear messages need to be stuck to, without straying from the point.
- *Timing:* Ideally, press conferences should be held early in the day to provide journalists with enough time to produce their reports. Monday to Thursday are optimal days for press conferences. Also, take note of other related events that might be occurring at the same time as yours, as it is worth considering whether these could add to your event or divert media attention away from what you plan to release.
- *Duration:* No more than 30 minutes and consist of a brief (five minute) introduction, followed by questions and answers (Q&A);



- *Don't crowd the dais:* The organization's head or a senior representative should be there, perhaps one other official or guest, and an Information or Public Affairs Officer to direct proceedings.

### Preparing for a press conference

- *Give prior notice:* Ideally, journalists should be notified of a press conference and venue a week in advance, and no less than three days before;
- *Talking points:* Craft a set of talking points, written succinctly, that can guide speakers in delivering crisp, informative comments to journalists during a press conference.
- *Q&A:* Prepare a dozen or so of the most difficult questions, with succinct answers, that could be expected — particularly if the subject is controversial or sensitive;
- *Write a press release:* Distributing a press release is beneficial. It sets the boundaries for the discussion; briefs journalists on the subject; and explains any necessary technical concepts, facts or figures, saving reporters from having to ask for these basic points during the conference and avoid mistakes being made in their reporting.
- *Attendance list:* A helpful tool that can be distributed to journalists for filling out during the press conference, giving

you a list of media representatives interested in your subjects. The list can also include the names and titles of the speakers at the conference, to help journalists in getting such details correct.

- *Name plate for speakers:* Preparing name plates for speakers assists journalists in directing questions and getting the correct spelling of names and forms of titles.
- *Branding/visibility:* Having your organization's logo displayed prominently at press conferences behind the speakers will see it captured by photographers and television crews, in turn increasing visibility.

### Advice for answering questions

- *Don't avoid questions:* Some believe long-winded answers forestall antagonistic questions. This is wrong. Tough questions will keep being asked as long as answers are not given, and you may be seen as avoiding the subject or covering up. Remember: what journalists need is an answer so they can complete their piece;
- *Defusing tough questions:* Responding to the essence of a tough question in a positive manner can defuse the situation by providing the needed answer while keeping control of the proceedings.

## After the press conference

- *Stand-up interviews:* Journalists, particularly TV and radio, may ask for brief stand-up interviews afterwards in order to record a “sound-bite” personalised for the particular media outlet. This can be arranged in an adjoining empty room, outside the building or wherever seems appropriate. Be sure to set aside time in the interviewee’s schedule for such extra interviews;
- *Press release:* Disseminate the release to journalists who couldn’t attend the press conference to receive wider coverage. If additional news comes out of the conference, you may consider issuing an additional release.

## Media briefings

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The only similarity between a press conference and a media briefing is that both involve reporters invited to consider an issue and to ask questions. While the two are often seen as identical, their style, conduct and purpose are quite different.

While the press conference is a setting for a formal announcement of a development, a media briefing is generally more informal and used to provide background to journalists about a particular subject that may be creating interest in the news and requires further explanation.



## Key elements

- *Participants:* usually a smaller group of journalists as opposed to a press conference, and involve officials who provide information on background without being quoted;
- *Regularity:* Some organizations stage regular briefings, such as the United Nations, offering opportunities for international organizations to release information to the international and local press corps;
- *Specialised topics:* You may organize a briefing on a certain project or programme, feeling it is of general interest for journalists.

Published stories may sometimes result, but that is not necessarily the aim. The media briefing can be whatever you deem useful: a familiarization with the work of the organization; an exchange of ideas; a press announcement of a low-key, low-interest nature; or a preview of something happening in the near future, such as an official visit by your organization's head to another country or a delegation soon arriving in your country. Such sessions help build relations with journalists and can make them more inclined to follow your activities closely.

## Seminars and workshops

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Well-run seminars and workshops, with a mixture of NMHS staff, invited experts and the media provide excellent opportunities to inform,

educate and learn. They foster greater understanding of each other's responsibilities, aims and problems.

Seminars, literally instructional classes on a chosen theme or subject, are reasonably simple to organize and run. With a prepared theme of vital interest and one or two instructors or lecturers, seminars are less interactive than workshops.

The workshop encourages practical participation. Usually running from three to ten days, a number of areas or themes can be covered. Exchanges of views and experiences occur in general discussion sessions, interspersed with pre-arranged groups splitting up to conduct practical exercises in different areas. Examples are preparing and airing radio or television weather forecasts; or handling a weather emergency through gathering facts and presenting them to the public through the media. Groups then report back at the next plenary session of the workshop on the results of their exercise.

Care should be taken in the selection of experts. Good communicators should be chosen. Watch your agenda, too; packing it with too many lectures or items can result in truncated or cancelled sessions and weary participants.

WMO, through its Information and Public Affairs (IPA) Programme and its Public Weather Services (PWS) Programme, with the support of NMHS, organizes training workshops on communication with participants from all WMO regions. These have a special emphasis

on the presentation of weather information on broadcast media, with the involvement of professional associations.

These events have enhanced the capacities of meteorologists responsible for presenting weather on television, or regular dealings with the media. WMO has completed a training film designed to provide this vital information to those unable to attend workshops.

## Press releases

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Press releases should be issued when you have news to report to the media. They should be about something that you can imagine would grab the interest of journalists, either something so immediate that you cannot wait for a press conference to be called and organized, such as the result of a topical meeting or an urgent announcement about an extreme weather event.

Otherwise, most releases are prepared to accompany press conferences and announcements of major events that have been organised in advance.

## Vital components of a press release

- *Short:* The release must be straight to the point and easily understood. The news element must be clearly stated in a short headline and a brief introduction, no longer than 40 words and always written in active voice. Don't overwrite. The

release ideally should fit on one page or both sides one sheet. Carefully select background to include so as to ensure the release is not too “heavy” to read;

- *What to highlight:* Journalists prefer to report on things that are “firsts,” “biggest,” “newest,” in other words something that represents a change. So make sure that when possible these elements are highlighted prominently;
- *Jargon, acronyms:* Avoid long collections of words (such as long titles) or overly technical vocabulary, as you risk losing the journalist’s interest;
- *Annexes:* These can be helpful to ensure that all the information you feel necessary is available to journalists, but kept out of the press release, which must be streamlined, straight to the point and easily understood;
- *Languages:* If possible, the release should be made available in the local language, as well as the language of other countries where you want your news reported;
- *Dateline, location:* Press releases should include the date that the news is being released on and the location of where it happened (e.g. the city hosting the NMHS headquarters or the venue of an important meeting that your organization has a presence at).

- *Mission statement:* A tight paragraph describing the NMHS' aim and mission should be included in all press releases to serve as both context and a reminder to journalists of what the organization is all about.
- *Contacts:* It should carry telephone, fax and e-mail details of named contacts and communication officers;
- *Images:* Photographs, video footage, diagrams or other graphic material can help journalists filing their report. If these components are available, reference should be included at the end of the release.

A carefully crafted, well-written and well-timed press release gives reporters a ready-made story, or a text they can quickly edit or rewrite according to their needs. A press release also provides you with a written record for wider distribution to partners and sister organizations.

A worthwhile addition to this category is the information note. This multi-faceted release can be used fairly frequently, without inundating the reporter or editor with unsolicited material or cramming extraneous information into press releases.

### **Information notes**

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Similar to press releases, WMO issues information notes, which rather than promote current news events provide background information



on issues related to weather, climate or water; updates of previously released information; media advisories and advance notice of events; and profiles of personalities, biographies and organizational announcements. The information note is a useful tool to disseminate information on subjects that are not hard news, but are still important to your organization. They can also serve as reference documents that journalists can use when seeking background information for their reports.

## **Feature Articles**

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Feature articles and ideas may not be the life-blood of media relations, but can help maintain regular links with the media. Newspapers, news agencies and magazines are often faced with blank pages that are not always easy to fill especially on “quiet” news days. Hence reporters welcome a regular supply of feature material. A regular flow of articles and ideas will not only strengthen your working association with the media, it will help keep weather-, climate- and water-related issues in the public’s eye. It helps shape a dynamic image of WMO and NMHS.

Such articles often stimulate ideas for shorter television and radio pieces popular with broadcasters.

Feature articles do not have the immediacy of hard news and can be researched, written and circulated when information officers are less busy. As they are more often than not held for later publication, features should have a “flexible” time element so they don’t go out of date.

## Components of a feature article

- *Style:* Written in a lively, imaginative style with colour, anecdotes and quotes. Focussing on the human interest element and how weather affects people are good approaches;
- *Length:* Feature stories can be up to 1000 words in length;
- *Images:* Evocative photos, graphics and other images help illustrate the story and provide design options for editors;
- *Contacts:* If a media outlet is interested in using your feature story idea, they may want to recast the story and possibly speak to experts or officials from your agency for further comment.

## Video-films and clips

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A short (maximum 15 minute) high-quality professional video or film clip, produced on the World Meteorological Day theme, or any other event important to your agency, will attract coverage from the broadcast media. These films can also be screened during “Open Days” organized during World Meteorological Day by NMHS.

The above suggestions and practical guidelines apply also to the celebrations of other international days, such as World Water Day (22 March), World Environment Day (5 June), the World Day to Combat Desertification

and Drought (17 June), the International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer (16 September), the International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction (second Wednesday of October) and other global events.

Such films, and any other relevant footage, can be distributed to local TV stations for use, or to major television footage distributors. If such footage relates to a story or an event that you want to promote, you should provide, at least, a press release explaining the issue captured on film, a script, and specific details of where the footage was taken and who is speaking.

The “video news release” is another tool you can consider using, which involves a selection of good quality footage, possibly an interview with the organization’s head, and a script or press release, to then send as a packaged news item to a broadcaster. Some broadcasters are willing to air “public service announcements” produced by your organisation that promote your work, ranging generally in length from 15 to 60 seconds.

Consideration of the film’s format must be taken depending on the region where you intend it to be used. Northern America, for example, uses the “NTSC” format, while in Europe it is “PAL.” In many developing regions, such as Africa, the format used is called “SECAM.”

## **Webcasts**

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Webcasts are online press conferences that reach journalists who aren’t physically able to attend an actual press conference or interview.

Although a certain amount of information technology is required, the benefits can be worthwhile in terms of media coverage. The same technology also permits the NMHS to air speeches, for example.

## Email

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Emailing your press releases, info notes, media features, newsletters and advisories is fast, inexpensive and environmentally friendly however, it's important to remember several points:

- Create large, flexible databases of contacts and update them regularly;
- Don't flood your contacts with every single piece of information; know your recipient's needs and send each item once only;
- Formulate your messages as you would standard mail. Email is no excuse for bad grammar and spelling, which reflect poorly on your organization;
- Don't add bulky attachments: recipients may be unable to download them. Place such material on a separate page or website and provide recipients with the relevant URL.

Answering emails from the media or general public promptly cannot be overemphasized. It establishes a favourable line of communication,



ensuring that questions and issues are quickly addressed. This means someone reliable, preferably with an understanding of media requirements, should monitor incoming emails regularly.

### **Blogs and forums**

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Establishing a blog, an online forum or chat room on your website can attract more visitors. Media outlets, weather services, independent scientists and many others have set up blogs relating to weather, climate and water, allowing more informal comment and information to be disseminated and, importantly, facilitating public comment and interaction.

### **Special events**

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Whether to publicize WMO or the NMHS, heighten interest, or forge new links with the press and public (or all three), special events require imagination and flair to create and time and energy to sustain. They must have substance and meaning. They must be targeted.

World Meteorological Day, WMO's annual flagship event on 23 March, focussing on a specific theme each year aims at raising public awareness of the importance of meteorology and hydrology, both to the long-term development of nations, and to the everyday lives of people.

WMO produces promotional materials aimed at policy-makers, the media and the general public. Following the 1992 United Nations

Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, known as the “Earth Summit,” WMO began building an alliance with media representatives — particularly radio and TV broadcasters — to mobilize support for World Meteorological Day. The aim is to create a worldwide alliance of media professionals committed to raising awareness by airing programmes on issues affecting everybody: weather, climate and water resources; the growing depletion of the ozone layer; potential impacts of climate change, such as global warming and rising sea level; and extreme weather events, such as floods and droughts; and promoting climate adaptation and mitigation activities.

Today, many broadcasters place World Meteorological Day high on their news agenda on or around 23 March.

In working with local and national media, IPA focal points in WMO’s 188 Member NMHS should encourage broadcasters to prioritise the World Meteorological Day theme. The idea is to have each broadcaster or media representative join the global alliance, whether by devoting air time to the Day’s theme in weather presentations, or incorporating it in news, documentaries, films and entertainment programmes.

### **Press kits for Special Events**

Press or information kits are invaluable for promoting special events and can include:

- A press release;
- Well-written thematic feature articles for publication or as ideas for TV and radio;
- Fact sheets;
- Booklet and poster, for instance, on the World Meteorological Day theme.
- Supporting photographs, graphs and, ideally, film footage.

## **Media Databases and Monitoring**

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Having an extensive, updated list of media contacts is essential for your public relations efforts. Obtaining email and telephone details of journalists representing all major local media outlets (television, newspaper and radio) is key. Ideally find the contacts for environmental and science correspondents, who are more likely to show stronger interest in your agency's activities. Noting which journalists report on your organization, or issues related to it, is also helpful for future reference.

Numerous established media monitoring services can assist in tracking news of your organization, or more ad hoc means such as browsing the Internet yourself for stories related to your work by searching for the name of your NMHS can rapidly locate related media pieces.

### Media monitoring is useful for numerous reasons, including:

- Tracking favourable and unfavourable pieces: These can be forwarded to those concerned, allow for negative publicity to be addressed quickly, and help you when developing your media strategy;
- Monitoring success of media activities: Numerous national and international companies monitor and distribute related media coverage, and provide suitable statistics. But these come at a price.

### Using WMO

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The WMO Secretariat produces a wide variety of printed and online publications that NMHS can directly contribute to or use as part of their media outreach activities. Several are available in the six official United Nations languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, Spanish). The Secretariat also offers services, such as media outreach, to help you get your message out to the public at large.

Special events, like the World Meteorological Day, are designed so NMHS can capitalise on the publicity surrounding the global annual event by arranging local celebrations of the Day, and using WMO produced materials, namely a message from the WMO Secretary-General, a brochure, a poster and usually a film.



## WMO ITEMS THAT HELP RAISE AWARENESS OF NMHS INCLUDE:

- The WMO Bulletin, WMO's official journal, [http://www.wmo.int/pages/publications/bulletin/index\\_en.html](http://www.wmo.int/pages/publications/bulletin/index_en.html);
- Bi-monthly Meteoworld, a web-based newsletter in PDF that can be printed from your computer terminal, [http://www.wmo.int/pages/publications/meteoworld/\\_en/index\\_en.html](http://www.wmo.int/pages/publications/meteoworld/_en/index_en.html);
- World Climate News is a bi-annual 12-page newsletter covering recent and ongoing climate events and anomalies and their socio-economic impacts, [http://www.wmo.int/pages/publications/showcase/documents/WCN31\\_E.pdf](http://www.wmo.int/pages/publications/showcase/documents/WCN31_E.pdf)
- "News" on the web, which is a page on the WMO internet site featuring brief stories and relevant internet links, [http://www.wmo.int/pages/mediacentre/news/index\\_en.html#news](http://www.wmo.int/pages/mediacentre/news/index_en.html#news);
- "News from Members," another WMO web page that offers Members an extremely visible platform to post information relating to your work, [http://www.wmo.int/pages/mediacentre/news\\_members/newsfromMembers\\_en.html](http://www.wmo.int/pages/mediacentre/news_members/newsfromMembers_en.html);

- Press releases and Info Notes, which highlight WMO news events of note, often involving NMHS and issued jointly.
- “E-News,” which is a service provided by WMO to disseminate within our extensive media e-mailing list news our Members want to have publicised.
- [wmofeed.org](http://wmofeed.org) is WMO’s online multi-language forum where weather presenters from all over the world can exchange data such as graphics or images, pose questions, provide solutions, discuss presentation skills and relevant technologies for improved weather broadcasts.
- The daily “WMO in the News” collection of news stories dealing with WMO and NMHS.

## WMO PUBLICATIONS OF STRONG INTEREST TO MEDIA WORLDWIDE INCLUDE:

- The WMO Statement on the Status of the Global Climate, released in March each year explaining climate conditions that affected the Earth in the previous year from January to December. Near the end of each year, a preliminary status report is disseminated to the media, detailing the major trends but including a caveat that the final status document will be released in March once the final climate data for the year has been taken into account;
- El Niño and La Niña updates, which are consensus reports detailing the latest developments regarding these phenomena;
- Greenhouse Gas Bulletin, which details the composition of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere;
- Antarctic and Arctic Ozone Bulletins, which contain information on the development of the ozone layer over the Earth's poles.

## PWS PUBLICATIONS TO ASSIST IN DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

### **Examples of Best Practice in Communicating Weather Information**

<http://www.wmo.int/pages/prog/amp/pwsp/documents/TD-1409.pdf>

### **Guidelines on Weather Broadcasting and the Use of Radio for the Delivery of Weather Information**

<http://www.wmo.int/pages/prog/amp/pwsp/pdf/TD-1278.pdf>

### **Guidelines on the Improvement of NMSs - Media Relations and Ensuring the use of Official Consistent Information**

<http://www.wmo.int/pages/prog/amp/pwsp/pdf/TD-1088.pdf>

### **Weather on the Internet and Other New Technologies**

<http://www.wmo.int/pages/prog/amp/pwsp/pdf/TD-1084.pdf>

# 8 CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

For many scientists and technical experts, being interviewed by a television, radio or print journalist may seem daunting. But keep in mind that you are the expert and know the subject matter. Approach an interview as you would a conversation with any person from another field who wants to learn something new about your work. Take the time to patiently and simply explain complex scientific terminology and concepts.

## **Pre-recorded interviews**

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Pre-recorded interviews, either TV, radio or print, are not live and are conducted by journalists who are gathering information often for a broader story that has no urgent time element and is intended for release at a later date.

Interviewees must:

- Know their subject;
- Have facts and figures at hand;
- Have a message or theme to weave into their answers.  
Something important to the work of your organization, that you want the public to know;
- Keep the interview brief, but powerful;
- Not waste words; avoid jargon and complicated terminology;



- Think about who the listener or viewer is and what level of understanding they may or may not have in the topic being discussed;
- Take note of their appearance and style of dress.

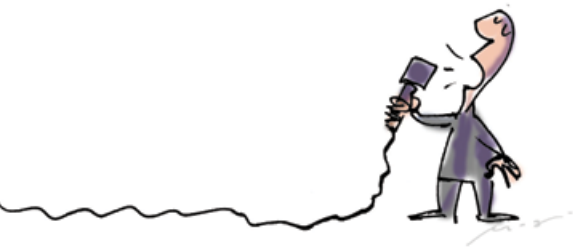
### Television interviews

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While TV cameras, microphones and studios can appear daunting, there are ways to approach them to make you feel more comfortable in front of the lens.

#### During TV interviews, it is important to:

- *Stay calm and look relaxed.* The interviewee should try and feel as comfortable in front of the camera as possible.
- *Don't feel "pinned down" by the camera.* Allow yourself normal gestures, and blink naturally and regularly.
- *Take one question at a time.* Do not be preoccupied with what you want to say next. Listen to the questions and don't gaze around the room or beyond the camera.
- *Never lose your temper.* You may have a good reason to be angry with hostile questioning or an argumentative panellist, but stay calm and respond firmly yet politely. Take care



with facial expressions. Contempt, ridicule or anger is easily conveyed; the camera picks up every detail of your face and body language.

- *Mind your hands and feet.* When seated, rest your arms on the chair arms, on the table or in your lap, but don't clench your fingers as this shows tension. If seated but not at a table, cross your feet at the ankles.
- *Stand-up interview.* Keep your hands lightly at your sides. Place your feet slightly apart to avoid swaying. Look at the interviewer and gesticulate to emphasize a point, without exaggerating.

## Remote interviews

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Remote interviews are where you are in one place and the interviewer is in another. These can be disconcerting. Once again, listen to what is being said. Almost always someone will tell you what to do. You may be left alone in a room with a camera. In this case, look at the camera throughout the interview. Do not look around. You may have to wear an ear-piece to hear what is being asked. If it comes loose, hold it in place with one hand. Place it back in your ear if it falls out.

Studio or camera lighting can be a nuisance, but is unavoidable. Lights are very bright and often hot in an enclosed space. Do not be tempted to wear sunglasses or to shield your eyes with your hand. Television interviews do not normally last long. Because of the lighting

conditions, most TV studios will insist on make-up. They can also advise on appropriate clothing and colours.

During pre-recorded radio interviews, remember the journalist will edit the piece. This means you can stop at any time you feel unhappy with your answer and ask the reporter to rephrase the question.

### **One-on-one interviews/exclusives**

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“One-on-ones” or “exclusives” are a less common form of interview, but are useful if you need to target a message at a certain sector of the public, or if you have a delicate topic to discuss and you wanted to do so with a trusted journalist.

Such interviews are usually sought by the reporter or broadcast producer. But they can also be at your request in order to reach a particular readership or audience that your organization wants to address. They are carried out under a different set of ground rules — some mutually beneficial to you and the reporter, and others that favour one more than the other. You need to be even-handed with the media in granting them. Favouring prestigious newspapers or broadcast networks over lesser known outlets causes resentment and damages your organization’s reputation for equity.

Reporters seek exclusive interviews with heads of organizations and other specialists purely because they want sole use of the insights and answers to private questions.

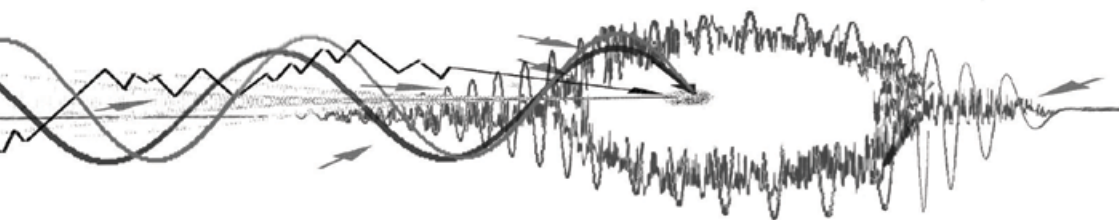


While it is acceptable to ask the reporter in advance the general theme of his or her questions, to receive the actual questions beforehand is rare. In principle, journalists do not like to do this as it could ruin the spontaneity of the responses. But, at the same time, you can state as a pre-condition of the exclusive interview that you want to know what questions are going to be asked. It is also acceptable for you to tape the interview for your own record. You are doing the journalist a favour in giving them an exclusive, so they at the same time should be equally accommodating. This gives you the chance to be properly briefed ahead of time.

Unexpected, last-minute requests for a private interview can be trickier. Unless senior staff are comfortable with both the subject and type of interview, you may consider delaying the interview to give you time to gather your thoughts and the facts. Such a delay might result, however, in the journalist or broadcaster losing interest in doing the interview, which could mean a lost opportunity to publicize your work.

One-on-one interviews can last as long as you need. They are by nature informal, and can take place in various locations. Over coffee, in an office, at a restaurant. It depends on you. Broadcasters occasionally need to tape an interview in their own studio.

A theme, message or messages should be developed when preparing for an interview. With this in mind, it is possible both to answer the questions and to lead the reporter back to the theme and underline the message.



The theme and/or message is obvious if the interview is in connection with the launching of a major report, event or conference. In such cases, it is possible, and understood by reporters, that a series of one-on-one interviews with a variety of correspondents has been arranged. However, it is advisable for the organization's head or expert to change his or her theme with each or tailor the responses to the national, regional or hemispheric origins of the publication or broadcast station carrying the interview.



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## 9 COMMUNICATING IN INSTITUTIONAL CRISIS SITUATIONS

Your organization may be confronted by an internal matter that attracts media attention. A public action taken by your organization, say in the form of an inaccurate or late weather warning, may be the focus of negative press. In either case, dealing transparently and promptly with the media will build trust and help prevent a situation spiralling out of control.

### **Establish an Institutional Crisis Management Group**

As soon as a crisis is identified as imminent or has commenced, such a group should be formed immediately. This is essential for preparing a media strategy for the NMHS, as well as enabling the WMO Secretariat to coordinate institutional announcements to the media and answer anticipated questions.

Formation of such a group is essential to foster internal coordination and coherence in reporting. This group's terms of reference should be defined, taking into account recommendations and requirements mentioned below. The organization's head should be kept fully informed at all times.

### **Informing the media in a timely manner**

This shows that the organization is transparent and accountable. This also prevents the crisis from being "discovered" by the media, which can damage the organization's credibility and public image. Lastly, a quick response to a contentious issue may help to take the

heat out of a situation and more quickly reduce the media's interest in the story.

### **Provide comprehensive information without interfering with legal proceedings**

All relevant information about a crisis should be provided to the media in so far as it does not prejudice legal investigations. Doing so shows transparency, gains credibility and contributes to accurate reporting.

The wide media interest that can be generated by a crisis can also be an opportunity for announcing action taken to avoid similar crises in the future.

### **Speaking with one voice - designating a spokesperson**

An organization should speak with one voice to ensure consistent media communications. This is more critical when a crisis develops.

- All media queries should be referred to the spokesperson.
- All staff, particularly directors, should be informed of the value to refer all media queries to the spokesperson.
- The spokesperson should be kept up-to-date of developments and should liaise with the organization's legal adviser to build a media strategy.

- All communications with the media should be written to reduce the risk of being misquoted and be able to prove what was said and when.
- Transcribe statements made at press briefings, as well as interview questions and answers.
- Provide talking points to relevant authorities and partner organizations potentially connected to the crisis to ensure consistency of response.

### **Monitoring media coverage**

It is important to monitor media coverage of a crisis to provide feedback to all concerned, to assess the media strategy and make changes.

# 10 CONCLUSION

Raising awareness of the media and the public at large about meteorological and hydrological information is essential for enhancing safety and well-being. At the same time it will build support for NMHS, enabling them to further improve and share their products.

WMO and NMHS are generally recognized for their scientific and technical contribution. In order to increase support from decision-makers, their contribution to socio-economic development also needs to be recognized. Interaction with end-users of weather, climate and water services will help demonstrate the social and economic value of NMHS. NMHS may wish for media purposes to share information with the Secretariat and among them illustrating concrete societal benefits arising from their activities.

**Investing in weather, climate and water information through NMHS is an investment in well-being and prosperity for all**







**World  
Meteorological  
Organization**  
**Weather • Climate • Water**

For more information, please contact:

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