

How to: write a killer press release



**Friends of
the Earth**

Whether you're organising a demonstration against a new out-of-town supermarket, persuading your MP to back a strong climate change law or launching a campaign to save a local wildlife area, the right publicity can be the key to campaign success. A good press release is one of the most effective ways of getting your issue covered in the media. Communications and Media Assistant Phillip Byrne gives you top tips on how to write the perfect release

What is a press release?

A press release is a standardised way of communicating with journalists. If written well it will tell them what the story is at a glance – making their job easier and making it more likely they will cover your issue. Journalists get hundreds of press releases every day so you need to make sure yours stands out from the crowd.

What should your press release be about?

The most important thing about a press release is its content. What you are writing about has to be of interest to the journalist or they won't cover it. First and foremost it has to be newsworthy.

News has to be **new**. There is no point publicising an event or activity that happened a few weeks ago – it's been and gone. You need to talk about what's happening now or what's about to happen. This might be the launch of a new campaign, it might be new information, it might be an event or activity or someone new wading into a debate.

Human interest stories are very popular, especially in the local media. People are more interested in reading about how the Smith family around the corner has been affected by emissions from the nearby incinerator than they are about a bunch of combustion statistics.

Controversy or scandal is always of interest. If you are holding a public meeting think about getting people along who are completely opposed to each other (even if you think one of them is talking rubbish) to create a debate and media interest.

Quirky, unusual or **unexpected events and activities** are also newsworthy. This could be a humorous photo opportunity or stunt. Cornwall Friends of the Earth carved out their very own Halloween pumpkins as part of a GM food stunt – clever and effective.

Many people complain that all papers ever cover these days is celebrity. If you can't beat them, join them! This doesn't have to mean getting Leonardo DiCaprio on board – you could ask a **local celebrity** such as the Mayor or MP to support the campaign.

Finally, your story has to have some relevance for the people who are going to be reading or hearing about it. For the local media this means finding a **local angle**. For example, if the Government wants to relax planning laws you could focus on how the expected supermarket invasion could affect shops in your local community.

How should your press release look?

Here's a handy template for writing a press release – stick to these guidelines and you won't go wrong. You can also download a press release template from <http://community.foe.co.uk/publicity>

Press Release



**Friends of
the Earth**

For immediate release: [date]

(If you want the media to use the story as soon as they receive it)

or

Embargoed for: [time/date]

(This is a good way of giving journalists time to prepare and to ensure they don't use it until a specified time)

Headline

(Start with a snappy headline, but not too clever)

Photo opportunity: (What it is, where it is, when it is and contact details)

Paragraph 1: Summarise the story - who, what, where, when and why.
All key information needs to be in this paragraph

Paragraph 2: Put in more details to flesh out the story
you have outlined in the first paragraph

Paragraph 3: "Quotes from you or someone relevant to the story." Don't try to
cram too many points into one quote – each quote should make one point

Paragraph 4: Extra relevant information

Ends

Notes for Editors

- Provide background information in case they run a longer story
- Outline what you have to offer: pictures, interviewees
- Outline any additional relevant information or facts and figures, but keep it short.

Contact Make sure you supply numbers where you can be reached day or night. This can make the difference between your story being covered or not

Name: [type name1]

Tel: [type tel1]

Name: [type name2]

Tel: [type tel2]

[type your group name here] Local group

[type your group address here on one line separated by spaces]

Telephone [type fax no] Fax [type fax no] Email [type group email] Website [type wweb address]

Eight top tips to remember

- 1 Know your media** – read your local paper, listen to your local radio and watch your local TV so you know how they report stories and what type of stories they like. Ring them up and check which journalists cover your issue and when their deadlines are. Introduce yourself and tell them what issues you work on.
- 2 Keep your press release short and to the point** – preferably all on one page or maximum two.
- 3 Send your press release in the body of the email** – don't send it as an attachment and don't include logos. Emails with attachments often get bounced back.
- 4 Follow up your release** – ring the news desk to check they have your release, whether they will be covering the story and if they have all the information they need.
- 5 Pick your time to ring journalists** try not to ring close to deadlines as they won't have time to chat. You can find out their deadlines by ringing the news desk. For example, journalists on daily papers are usually very busy in the late afternoon – it's best to ring them mid-morning.
- 6 If the journalist isn't interested in your story, ask why** – it will be useful learning for your next story.
- 7 Don't be put off** – there might be a whole host of reasons why your story isn't used – a bigger news story might have squeezed it out, they may have just run a similar story or it might not have grabbed the editor of the day. Keep trying.
- 8 Interesting photo opportunities might generate media interest** – particularly for TV, which needs something to film. For example, if you meet the council you could make it more interesting to the media by organising a photo opportunity outside.



Persuading the media to publicise your brilliant product, idea or compelling message is more effective and credible than advertising. Almost anything can be made newsworthy if you package it appropriately.”

Irene Krechowiecka, *The Guardian*



Ask yourself who the audience is and what you really want the coverage to achieve – more supporters, names on a petition, consumer action. By showing how local environmental issues really affect the quality of people's lives where you live and offering positive solutions your local group can become a respected voice for change within your community. The more people read and hear about you, the more confident they become in your ability to influence the powers that be.”

Nicola Jackson, Communications and Media Manager, Friends of the Earth

If you would like to receive emails with suggestions for writing to the letters page of your newspaper, email raoul.bhambral@foe.co.uk with letters in the subject line.

Local Groups grab headlines

Here are some examples of Friends of the Earth Local Groups who have had media success

South Cheshire Friends of the Earth
6 — The Guardian November 30, 2006

Greens sound alarm over housing boom

by ANDREW MORRISON

GREEN campaigners are fighting parts of a long-term draft masterplan which they claim would result in an explosion of house and road building across the region.

Members of South Cheshire Friends of the Earth (FoE) have this week warned that proposals earmarked for inclusion in a draft strategy would see more than 410,000 new houses built in the North-West by 2021, including 8,000 in Crewe and Nantwich.

They also fear that around 3,600 new properties would be built on South Cheshire greenbelt.

Tania Sayer, South Cheshire FoE campaigns co-ordinator, said: "House building on this scale will make the region more vulnerable to the effects of climate change as the water supplies and sewage systems are by no means guaranteed."

"It is important the local people in Crewe and Nantwich are made aware that over 8,000 of these new houses are planned for this area, with approximately 45 per cent of those being built on greenfield sites.

"In light of the explosion of new build in recent years, especially around Nantwich, these proposals must be resisted."

The potential development boom is included in the draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), being drawn up by the North-West Regional Assembly.

The new RSS will set out the scale, speed and broad location of all development in the North-West until 2021, influencing future employment, transport, industry, housing, health and education.

It is currently the subject of an Examination in Public in front of a government-appointed panel of independent inspectors.

Once the panel has made its recommendations, the North-West government office, in conjunction with the Department for Communities and Local Government, will revise and confirm the final document.

That will be legally binding and all future Local Plans, which are set out in the crucial Local Development Frameworks, will need to conform with it.

South Cheshire FoE hopes the strategy will include strong climate change policies, but fears it will be motivated by the 'blinkered goal of continuous and unfettered economic growth'.

The Examination in Public will reconvene for a further three weeks in January.

Members of South Cheshire Friends of the Earth managed to get their story about large-scale house building into *The Guardian* newspaper.

Courtesy of Crewe Guardian



In December Newport Friends of the Earth hit the headlines when they got this story into the *South Wales Argus*.



Resources

- How to use the media: Change your world's pull-out guide is available from http://community.foe.co.uk/resource/how_tos/cyw_36_use_the_media.pdf
- The Media Trust Online Guides provide lots of helpful hints and tips on how to get the most out of the media. Look under Our Services – Online Guides at <http://www.mediatrust.org/>
- The BBC's online Action Network gives useful information on how to write press releases and also has advice on local campaigning <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/actionnetwork/A4288944>
- Tips for media coverage for The Big Ask in the Action guide, pages 7–8 http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/action_guides/bigask_actionpack_one.pdf
- Come to the media workshop at the Local Groups Conference. If you haven't registered yet for this three-day event, please see page 15 or go to <http://community.foe.co.uk/conference>

Music saves the earth!

WELSH bands are calling on music fans to help save the planet by attending a one-off gig at TJ's next week.

Newport Friends of the Earth have organised the bumper night of live music as part of the Big Ask campaign, which lobbied for a Climate Change bill at the Houses of Parliament.

Among the talent on display will be Cardiff-based group The Popples, whose melodic indie sound is influenced by a range of bands from the 1960s and '70s.

Attack and Defend are another Cardiff band – but don't pigeonhole them with an 'indie' or 'rock' tag.

A message on their website bears a description of their own music as "country-tinged electro in the indie-disco mould".

Also playing are The Strand, who provide