

Writing A News Release for your Community Action Award

One of the things your team must do for the Mass Envirothon Community Action Award is to write a quick and simple news release about your project. This is a great "real world" writing experience, and not nearly as difficult as it sounds.

A news release can capture the attention of a reporter and result in good visibility for the work you have done in your community. Keep your news release short and simple. Just three paragraphs, double-spaced on 1-2 pages, is plenty. The reporter will use your news release as a starting point for a larger story.

Below are some tips for writing a successful news release. These tips are quoted/paraphrased from a very helpful site, <http://www.free-press-release-center.info/fprctips.html>. Other recommended sites are <http://www.telegram.com/assets/static/misc/submitnews.pdf> and <http://www.greenmediatoolshed.org/training/WrittenCommunication/PressReleasesandPressLett.adp>

Start with a strong "lead" - The first paragraph of the news release is known as the "lead". The lead needs to be strong, communicating your message quickly and concisely. You need to use your headline and first paragraph effectively so that they stand alone and that if only those portions were to be read, there would be enough information to understand what the release is about. The rest of your news release should provide the detail. Journalists see maybe thousands of press releases a day, you have a few seconds to grab your their attention.

What is your angle? - The media are always on the look out for a good story. Your news release needs to be more than just fact, it needs to be newsworthy. Understanding why journalists would find your story interesting is the key to success. Think about the release from the reporter's point of view, put yourself in her shoes. It is best to make your news release timely and to tie it to current events or issues if possible. Find a good angle, a good news hook, and you have the start of a good news release.

Who, what, where, when and why - A good news release needs to answer all of the "W" questions (who, what, where, when and why), providing the journalist with useful information about your project.

Why should anyone care? - You need to concentrate on what makes your project unique. Ask yourself the question, "Why should anyone care?" Concentrate on the aspects of your project that makes it different, particularly how it involves local people addressing a real local problem.

Add the human touch - Always use real life stories, such as how your team identified the problem and designed your project. How did your project fulfill a need or help the community? Real life examples communicate the benefits in a powerful way.

Keep to the point - Use enough words to tell your story, no more and no less. Don't pad your release with unnecessary adjectives or flowery language. But at the same time make each word count.

Limit the jargon - The best way to communicate your news is to speak plainly. Your news release should be aimed at a general readership.

Sending the News Release

News Releases should be sent on your school/organization's **letterhead**. At the **top of the release**, put the **date** and the **name and contact information (phone and/or email)** for the team member who should be contacted when the reporter has questions. You can also include the following information at the end of the release:

The Envirothon is North America's leading natural resource education program for high school students, emphasizing hands-on, team-oriented problem solving and community involvement that prepares young people for environmental careers and active citizenship. For more information on the Massachusetts Envirothon, reporters can contact Diane Baedeker Petit at 413-253-4371 or Diane.Petit@ma.usda.gov.

Releases should be sent to **newspaper reporters** who cover your issue (e.g. environment or education) and **assignment editors** at television or radio stations. Check the newspaper or station web site to find the best contact person.