



Campaign News Desk

How to make the most of the media

Themes for local press releases

The ideal local press release on firework safety will focus on some local activity that is occurring or that you are organising for bonfire night or linked to the Millennium celebrations. If possible show how it relates to the wider national picture. It should be backed up by local statistics (see enclosed 'Counting the Cost - Accident Statistics 1998') and an authoritative or pertinent quote from a prominent local figure.

1999 DTI Firework Safety Campaign: Alcohol and Fireworks

The DTI is organising a national safety campaign, focusing on alcohol and fireworks. It is using TV adverts and posters to stress how explosive a mixture the two can be and that they are best kept apart! It is also distributing leaflets to guide those planning back garden displays (available at shops selling fireworks), public displays fact sheets and retailer fact sheets on fireworks. Describe how the key message can be carried forward in your area.

Firework Laws

Are your local enforcement authorities planning any special efforts to police the strengthened law on fireworks e.g. safety checks on retailers stocks and storage facilities; checks on under age sales? The minimum age for firework sales was raised in October

1997 from 16 to 18. It is now illegal to sell bangers and mini-rockets to the public. And packets of sparklers now carry a parental warning, "Warning: not to be given to children under 5 years of age".

Local Education Authorities (LEA)

Explain in your press release what your schools or playgrounds are doing locally to join the national campaign and spell out any particular local concerns over firework injuries. In 1998 the DTI backed by the Child Accident Prevention Trust (CAPT) and Cadbury's Drinking Chocolate (CDC), produced a leaflet on sparkler safety which was made available to every primary schoolchild. The 36% reduction in sparkler injuries last year was a very encouraging achievement. But the effort goes on and the sparkler safety messages are still extremely important. This year the CAPT/CDC emphasis is directed towards pre-school playgroups to try to stamp out sparkler injuries to toddlers. Check if your LEA is participating and get some parent, playgroup leader or teacher reaction.

Alcohol and Fireworks

The national agency, Alcohol Concern has prepared a fact sheet, 'Ten things you should know about alcohol!', which is enclosed in your tool kit. Include these points in your press release along with a quote from a specialist agency able to offer advice and comment on alcohol issues.

DTI, 1 Victoria Street, London SW1H 0ET

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Ten PR Tips

Local media will usually give space or airtime to firework safety but they generally want a local angle. This could be a concerted local safety initiative, an authoritative local spokesperson or a good photocall opportunity. The following ten PR ideas have worked in the past on other campaigns. Consider how you might adapt these approaches or come up with something similar to maximise media interest in your local firework safety campaign for 5th November and for the Millennium celebrations on New Year's Eve.

1. It will be really useful to form a working party of interested bodies, including Trading Standards, Fire Brigade, Police, Local Education Authority, PR professional and a local representative of Alcohol Concern or other specialist agency, who together could decide on your campaign theme (e.g. alcohol and fireworks don't mix), and list potential activities relating to this theme. Then allocate responsibilities and, if possible, appoint a lead media spokesperson.
2. Identify interview candidates who would have an interesting story to tell the media about fireworks - try the Trading Standards department, Fire Brigade, Alcohol Concern, your nearest hospital Accident and Emergency department or a former firework injury victim.
3. Recruit a local celebrity and arrange for them to visit some local schools to talk about firework safety. (Actors appearing at the local theatre may be willing to help.) This will be fun for the kids and good PR for the campaign. You will find speaking notes in this tool kit but remember to tailor your presentation to your audience.
4. Arrange a photocall with a local personality whose success relies on quick reactions, a clear head and the need to stay in control. It could be a sportsman, referee or umpire, a professional driver, bomb disposal expert, surgeon, even a juggler or circus performer. Use them to promote the message about leaving the alcoholic drinks until they are "off duty" and doing the same with fireworks.
5. Does your Trading Standards department arrange the testing of dubious fireworks? If so, invite the media to a demonstration at the test facility.
6. Arrange a photocall with the Fire Brigade or Police to demonstrate how alcohol can affect judgement and reaction times.
7. Ask the editor of your civic newspaper or your local newspapers to print one of the competition artworks contained in the tool kit. Set a few simple rules (e.g. age of participants) and see if you can find a way to offer prizes for the first ten correctly completed forms returned. Have a photocall to present the winners, and make the most of the opportunity to announce how well or badly respondents did in getting the right answers.
8. Try to get your local radio station and prominent local DJ behind your campaign. Suggest some safety messages they can use in programme breaks or as links between records.
9. If you've got one of the big soccer or rugby clubs in your area, suggest some firework safety messages for the electronic scoreboard, PA system or match day programme closest to November 5th and New Year's Eve.
10. Organise other competitions as a hook for the local media. Poster painting competitions are fine but the more original the these the better. Ideas could include designing a firework website or computer game, or even concocting a non alcoholic Millennium cocktail and giving it the best firework related name. Source prizes locally - try retailers of items of relevance to firework safety e.g. torches, gloves, soft drinks, vouchers for fast food outlets, free tickets to the local leisure centre or organised display.

There are plenty of other ways of getting publicity for firework safety without expending enormous effort or resources. Let us know how you get on so that good ideas can be passed on for next year - see the evaluation sheet enclosed.

For extra help and advice on your local campaign efforts please don't hesitate to contact your regional office of the Central Office of Information (COI), which will be fully briefed on the campaign, or your local representative of Alcohol Concern or similar agency.

If you're giving interviews to local newspapers or radio stations, you might also find the information in the Speaking Notes fact sheet helpful.

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