



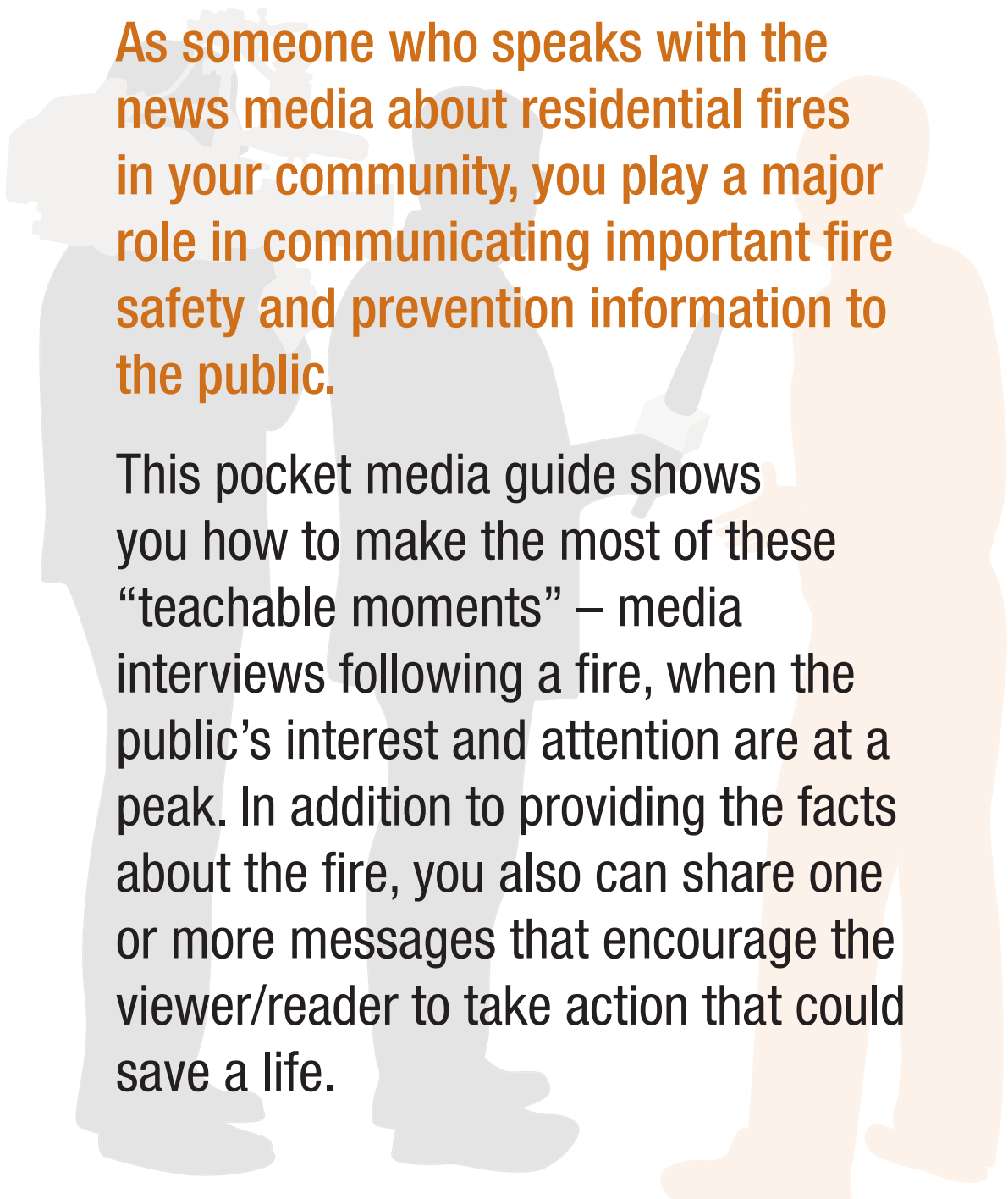
Fire Spokesperson's

# Pocket Media Guide



PRINT • RADIO • TELEVISION • INTERNET • PRINT • RADIO

*fireSafety.gov*

The background of the page features two stylized silhouettes. On the left, a grey silhouette of a person in a suit is shown in profile, holding a microphone towards the right. On the right, a larger, light orange silhouette of a person is shown in profile, facing left. The text is overlaid on these silhouettes.

**As someone who speaks with the news media about residential fires in your community, you play a major role in communicating important fire safety and prevention information to the public.**

This pocket media guide shows you how to make the most of these “teachable moments” – media interviews following a fire, when the public’s interest and attention are at a peak. In addition to providing the facts about the fire, you also can share one or more messages that encourage the viewer/reader to take action that could save a life.

## Here's what you can do:

### Before an Interview:

1. Put fire safety and prevention messages in your own words so they seem natural to you.
2. Make note of fire safety and prevention related services the fire department and local businesses offer that the community may not be aware of; for example, escape planning, free smoke alarm installation programs, etc.
3. Consider using statistics to create powerful “sound bites.” You can find national, state and county fire statistics at:
  - CDC's WISQARS™ (Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System database) ([www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars](http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars)).

- State and local health departments. Click on 'State Links' at [www.astho.org](http://www.astho.org). ASTHO is the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials.
  - CDC WONDER (Wide-ranging Online Data for Epidemiologic Research) (<http://wonder.cdc.gov/>).
4. Practice saying your sound bites so you are comfortable with them.



***Sample sound bites:***

- “In the U.S. someone dies in a house fire every 3 hours.” United States Fire Administration (USFA).
- “Every **X** days, someone in our state dies in a house fire. These deaths can be prevented.”

**For quick reference, create your own sound bites and write them in the space provided on page 17.**

## During an Interview:

While it always is important to answer a reporter's specific questions about the fire, it's also important and appropriate for you, as a community leader, to provide additional safety and prevention information during the interview.

No one knows more than you do how tragic a home fire can be. There may be times when you feel an on-the-scene interview is not the best time to talk about what could have been done to prevent a fire or the larger issues behind home fires. In these cases, follow-up or second-day stories may be more appropriate opportunities to provide safety and prevention messages.

Here are some ways you can communicate prevention information. Keep safety and prevention messages

DURING

closely linked to the current fire story; the more tailored the message, the more likely it will capture the media's attention.

## **1. Mention safety and prevention tips and facts**

Remind people about how to prevent fires from occurring and what they can do to lessen or avoid injury during a fire.



### ***Sample sound bites:***

- “Cooking is the leading cause of home fires in the United States. (USFA) When cooking, stay in the kitchen and keep an eye on the stove.”
- “Don’t overload extension cords or wall sockets. A fire caused by a faulty electrical system can destroy a home and everything in it within minutes.” Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC).

- “If a cooking fire starts, smother it with a pot lid. Never throw water on a grease fire.”
- “If there’s a fire – get out and stay out. Never go back into a burning home.”

## 2. Mention Smoke Alarms

Smoke alarms save lives. But many homes do not have smoke alarms. Others have smoke alarms that don’t work. Similar to news stories about motor vehicle crashes, which almost always mention whether riders were wearing their seatbelts, encourage reporters to mention whether the home had working smoke alarms. If this fact is not known at the time of the interview, follow up with the reporter once the investigation has determined this information and ask the reporter to mention it in any follow-up stories.



### *Sample sound bites:*

- “This is a good time to remind everyone that all homes should have working smoke alarms. Install smoke alarms outside sleeping areas and place a smoke alarm on every level of your home, including basements.”
- “All homes should have working smoke alarms. Contact your local fire department for more information about how to get smoke alarms for your home.”

### **3. Provide Statistics**

Numbers that are meaningful to the viewer/reader can help them see just how serious the problem of residential fires is and compel them to take preventive action. National statistics



provide the big picture, and local data can help drive the message home.



*Sample sound bites:*

- “Children make up 15% to 20% of all fire deaths. (USFA) Teach children never to hide if there’s a fire—but to get out and stay out.”
- “Heating is the second leading cause of home fires. (USFA) Never use the stove or oven to heat your home.”
- “There have been **X** more home fires in the county compared with this time last year. That’s a **X** percent increase. Call the fire department to schedule a free safety assessment visit.”

DURING

#### 4. Give a “Call to Action”

People often think about their personal situation when they hear about another person’s tragedy. They may want or need to do something, but may not know what to do or where to find information. You can empower people to protect themselves by providing clear, concrete action steps.



##### *Sample sound bites:*

- “Call the fire department at XXX-XXXX. We can help you create and practice a fire escape plan for your family.”
- “Here are three important things you can do to reduce your risk of injury from a home fire:
  - make sure your home has properly installed and working smoke alarms;

- plan and practice a fire escape plan; and
- in case of a fire, get out and stay out. Going back into a burning home can be deadly.”
- “Keep space heaters at least 3 feet away from anything that can burn - including furniture, blankets, curtains, and paper products.” (USFA)
- “Visit [www.FireSafety.gov](http://www.FireSafety.gov) for more fire safety and prevention tips.”

## **5. Direct the reporter to additional information and resources**

Encourage the reporter to visit [FireSafety.gov](http://FireSafety.gov) for information and resources that will help complete their story. These resources include:

- statistics and safety/prevention tips; and

- a library of free, high-quality images and broadcast-quality B-roll video footage of fire safety and prevention scenes that can be downloaded quickly and used as supporting visuals.

**For quick reference, create your own sound bites and write them in the space provided on page 17.**

### **After an Interview:**

Follow up with the reporter the day after the interview by phone or email.

1. Ask if the reporter needs any additional information for his or her story. Offer to provide safety and prevention tips that may be used as a sidebar (a shorter article

that accompanies a print article) or posted on the media outlet's website.

2. If the story has run, encourage a follow-up or feature story and offer to provide more safety and prevention tips or information about fire safety programs in the community.
3. Provide information from the fire investigation that was not available during the interview, such as whether there were working smoke alarms in the home.
4. Offer to serve as a resource for future safety- and fire-related stories.

AFTER

## Tips for Working with the Media:

Whether you're a seasoned veteran or a rookie at media relations, it's always a good idea to keep these interview pointers in mind:

1. Carry this pocket guide with you. Quickly scan it before you begin an interview.



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Media interviews are opportunities to communicate life-saving fire safety and prevention information.

**Tell your community how to stay safe!**

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2. Determine the one or two safety and prevention tips you want to mention in addition to the facts of the story.
3. Prior to the interview, mention to the reporter that you'd like to provide a fire safety and prevention tip or direct people to additional information.
4. Look at the reporter, not into the camera, during television interviews.
5. Avoid answering the reporter's questions with only "yes" or "no." Always speak in full sentences.
6. Remove sunglasses and chewing gum, and turn off your phone/pager before conducting the interview.

TIPS

7. Ask for the reporter's name and contact information, and the name of the media outlet so that you can follow up with more information or suggest a feature story about fire safety and prevention.
8. Provide your name and contact information in case the reporter has questions or needs more information.
9. Emphasize the importance of including a safety and prevention message to the reporter. This may prevent the message from ending up on the cutting room floor.



It may feel strange or even pushy the first few times you take the lead and add safety and prevention messages during an interview. But, your community looks to you for safety information. Providing this is one of the most important things you can do as a community leader. With practice, it will become more natural, even second nature, to share life-saving safety and prevention tips during interviews.

TIPS

Write your “sound bites” here:

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## Visit the Media/PIO pages of [FireSafety.gov](https://www.fire-safety.gov) for:

- More media relations and media interview tips
- Fire safety and prevention tips
- Statistics and data
- Fire safety and prevention images (print-quality photos)
- Broadcast quality B-roll footage of fire safety and prevention scenes
- Fire-related consumer product recalls
- Links to other fire safety and prevention sites
- More!

## Checklist:

### **Before an Interview:**

- √ Put safety and prevention messages into your own words
- √ Make note of fire department services
- √ Collect statistics
- √ Review the “sound bites” you’ve written on page 17
- √ Practice saying your “sound bites”

### **During an Interview:**

- √ Provide safety and prevention messages
- √ Mention smoke alarms
- √ Use supporting statistics
- √ Give a “call to action”
- √ Direct the reporter to [FireSafety.gov](https://www.firesafety.gov)

### **After an Interview:**

- √ Follow up with the reporter
  - Offer to provide additional information
  - Offer to serve as a resource

Media interviews are opportunities  
to communicate life-saving fire safety  
and prevention information.

**Tell your community how to stay safe!**

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