

DON'T BE AFRAID OF JOURNALISTS

Jan Pinos

PROGRAM ENERGETICKÝCH ÚSPOR

CEE

**bankwatch
network**

Krátká 26, Praha 10, 100 00
Tel. + fax: -2-781 65 71
E-mail: peu@ecn.cz
<http://peu.ecn.cz>

Krátká 26, Praha 10, 100 00
Tel. + fax: -2-781 65 71
E-mail: main@bankwatch.org
<http://www.bankwatch.org>

Foreword

Dear Friends,

Influence on People

You are probably individuals who like to promote positive changes in society, to impact people, to encourage them to be less selfish and make more responsible choices. You likely try to influence humankind's attitude towards other humans, nature, animals and life in general. In being reflexive about both yourself and your work, you are following the right path. Your work should be conscientiously chosen in order that it make positive contributions to society.

Before you begin reading the following advice on how to work and cooperate with the media, read over the title of this brochure: Do NOT be Afraid of Journalists. Journalists are people just like you. Try to talk to them. By trial and error, you will learn a great deal from your experiences with them.

The first hurdle for most environmental activists is their sense of fear and embarrassment about sharing personal opinions. Jump that hurdle and read on.

Media

The media is just one of many mediums through which people can be influenced. This is both a positive and a negative thing, but is definitely something to be fully aware of. Like it or not, your reputation lies in the hands of the press.

Some organisations underestimate media work, while others have built their existence on it. Such extremes should be avoided. Try to find a balance between your work and the manner in which it is presented to the public.

Do not, at any rate, overestimate the role of the press. As an illustration - do not use a bulldozer to do modest renovations to your attic. The media addresses issues in a superficial manner, quantity rather than quality being the deciding criteria. If you think over the limits of media work beforehand, you will avoid a lot of frustration.

Publicity is important on a number of levels. The press can help you reflect on your organisation, to better understand your social image. Such feedback is priceless.

The media, a revered but also cursed power, can be more influential than ministries. It is therefore very important to understand this power and to master it so that it can become a useful tool for your work. Do not be afraid of the press - they need you as much as you need them.

Why this handbook?

This handbook for environmental NGOs was written from a desire to document and pass on hard-earned experience, to make this knowledge easily accessible to fledgling activists and to serve as a refresher for more experienced activists.

We do not guarantee that your opinion will suddenly permeate the masses and that your bank account will overflow merely because you have followed the guidelines of this booklet. By following our recommendations, however, you will avoid unnecessary mistakes which would otherwise limit your ideas and work to your small circle of colleagues.

Happy reading and good luck in your future work!

Note This booklet uses the term 'journalist' in the broadest sense, instead of 'media representative'. The word 'press' is used for the media in general. The word 'group' often refers to an organisation.

WHY WORK WITH THE MEDIA?

Reasons for Media Work

There are at least four good reasons for doing media work:

1. Public discussion about an issue

The media is the fastest and most effective way of informing the public about an issue as well as sharing your perspective on it. A single press release will not begin a public debate; thorough, long term press work is necessary for this purpose.

2. Political pressure

Your opponents (industry representatives, civil servants, politicians) are much more likely to listen to you and take into account your opinions if you talk to them about a well-known issue. Their careers depend on their social status.

3. A positive public image

Tell people that you exist and that you are trying hard to make positive social changes. Do not hesitate to publicise your achievements. People will find it easier to support you if they know something about your past work (see Chapter 6).

4. Environmental issues should not be kept secret

Most of your opponents will take advantage of the fact that environmental problems are usually solved behind closed doors. They find disclosure unpleasant, not least because they are forced to be more careful about following the legal guidelines of any given case. When environmental data is kept secret, it severely hinders the creation of environmentally-friendly solutions. This lack of transparency also threatens the very basis of democracy.

Importance of Media

Though media work is just one of many tactics in your strategy, it is of extraordinary importance. In fact it is one of the most efficient tools for achieving your campaign goals. The presence of the media at direct actions is especially important.

WHAT YOU NEED

„Courage“: Overcome your own fear of the media.

„Hardware“: Telephone, fax machine, computer or typewriter, photocopier, letterhead paper. Sometimes a typewriter, a copy shop in town and a fast messenger will suffice.

„Software“: the right person, issue, event.

Who Works with Media

It is best for an organisation to have a media person (or spokesperson). His or her main role is to cooperate with the press and to stay in touch with journalists. The media person coordinates the organisation's media activity and guarantees its results. S/he must be informed about the relevant issues and about the current social and political situation. S/he only makes statements after consulting with the colleague in charge of the given issue, or makes a statement together with this person.

If the organisation has no media person, then one individual, preferably the president of the organisation, should be chosen to make the media presentations.

Who Expects What

You want to publish a news items and journalists want to receive valuable and well-written news items. Though these two desires do not contradict each other, they are not identical. Keep that in mind.

Value and Assertion of Report

Not only is the quality of the issue itself important, it is also important to know how it fits into the current political agenda, the slant of the media, the editor's agenda, etc.

The news will be more interesting for the reading audience if it is related to current social or political issues. If you are expressing an opinion about an issue that currently

permeates society, chances are it will be published. If you are attempting to publish your own big story, try to tie it in with something current.

Because all news cannot be covered by the media, even your best piece may fall by the wayside if there are too many other events happening at any given time.

Your piece will look more attractive to the media if it has a snazzy title referring to something really hot, like „The Chernobyl Next Door“.

HOW YOU BEGIN

Directory Prepare a directory of media and journalists with a listing of telephone and fax numbers. Get some advice about who has empathy for your issue - it is far better to contact „allied“ journalists than to pull names out of a hat. Update this list regularly, adding helpful reminders about „who is who“. Take care of the directory - it will be one of your greatest aids. Update it and always keep it with you. Be aware of the submission deadlines and abide by them.

If you are just starting out, let the press know about the existence of your organisation and the type of work you do. Send in information about your NGO, its function, and a list of people responsible for different issues and their contacts.

GENERAL ADVICE

Speak **Your information must be correct!**

Truth **Do not publish information for which you have no proof.** Always refer to the original source (author's name, job title, the source and date of the citation). Avoid citing secondary sources.

Never use or cite second-hand information.

Activists often suffer from a „professional disease“ called anterior optimism. You need this optimism to run campaigns but avoid it when communicating with the media. Try to be as serious and sober as possible.

It is much easier to damage your reputation than to improve it. Furthermore, if your information is false, you not only damage your own reputation, but also that of the allied journalist who reported the incorrect information.

Own News vs. Reactions If your organisation is active, you will mostly publicise your own work. Do not, however, forget to keep track of the important events and issues related to what you do, analyse them and comment on them. If you do not do this first, you may be taken by surprise if an investigative journalist asks your opinion on some aspect of a problem about which you are clearly unaware. Nonetheless, it is desirable to be bombarded with questions from the press about important issues! Such a situation is great because it means the press considers you an important partner in the public debate.

„No Comment“ **Don't be afraid to not comment.** Do not be ashamed to refuse commentary. It is far more shameful to opine about issues you do not understand. Comment on issues related to your work but do not try to state your opinion on everything.

When you decline to comment, try to give the journalist advice about whom s/he might contact instead of you.

Speak and Write Properly **Speak and write clearly, concisely, properly.** Journalism has its own writing style, vocabulary and discourse, but this must not inhibit your creativity and imagination. You must not accept ugly and official „newspeak“ - a type of language employed more and more often in the media and even on the streets. Use easy sentences and words, and avoid using too many foreign terms. Always proof-read your writing (at least once).

- Be Up-to-date** The media is dying for hot news. You might not agree with this attitude, but it is good to respect it. If you have nothing new to say, stay silent.
- Distinguish carefully between news and other coverage such as magazines, and choose accordingly the contents and speed of the release. Do not neglect the latter coverage as it is allotted more space and more points can be covered than in fast reporting.
- The fastest way to turn off journalists is to bore them.
- Answer Intelligibly** NGOs, especially activist NGOs, usually have a clear mission and clear-cut opinions. You will gain no points with either the public or journalists if you speak evasively, like a foreign affairs minister.
- If you avoid ambiguous diplomatic answers, the media will be less likely to distort your statements.
- Keep in mind that you are trying to address the general public, not preach to the converted.
- Don't Say Too Much** **Don't say everything at once - less means more in some cases!** Concentrate on the main issue and leave out the marginal information - you won't scatter people's attention and you will also encourage journalists to remain interested in the issue. If you strive to say it all at once, journalists will only get confused, won't write anything at all, and you will get the short end of the stick the next time around. Work like a photographer - use a process of elimination. The media (with the possible exception of investigative journalism) cannot and does not want to see issues in their entirety, the way you do. The media only understands issues as single problem statements.
- Don't Be Afraid of 'Intimate' Questions** Sometimes you'll be asked intrusive, confrontational questions. Give only premeditated replies. Keep in mind that anything you say can easily be turned against you. Protect yourselves by releasing your own press release on the issue. The degree of vigilance naturally depends on the credibility of the given medium and on how well you know the journalist.
- Take charge of the situation - do not let anyone push you into a debate in which you do not want to participate. Don't be provoked; don't say things you will later regret.
- Cite Examples** Concrete examples will make complex statements with lots of new information more intelligible. Notable examples worth following in other countries are especially useful and positive solutions should be recommended.
- Proof-read!** **Make sure you proof-read your texts carefully for contents as well as spelling.** Grammatical and stylistic mistakes are often the worst flaws in activist publications.
- You must not be the only one to proofread your own work; have the most knowledgeable writer in your office edit your writing. One often tends to overlook one's own worst mistakes.
- Avoid Publishing at Peak Times** Avoid scheduling actions on the same day as other, especially politically important, actions. A press agency can help you with the planning, as it keeps track of all important planned events. Do not plan actions for days when other important environmental activities are scheduled. Usually only one journalist on each editorial staff is in charge of environmental issues, and both you and the other environmental organisations will get less coverage.
- Remember to Use Pictures** Visuals influence human beings more than the written or spoken word. Plan your actions so that they not only provide the public/journalists with interesting information, but also with photo and film opportunities. If you accompany your texts with photos, you are far more likely to have your material published.
- Be Loyal** Remain independent but remember that what you claim in public should not contradict the official opinion of your organisation. Journalists don't take well to diversity of

opinion within the environmental movement, so it is wise to unify your stance with that of other environmental organisations. The present climate demands this, unfortunately.

Be Patient Don't expect instant miracles with your media work. Sometimes your opponent will get better press coverage than you; sometimes your statements will be misrepresented; from time to time you will even fail at getting your reports and opinions published. Your performance and your credibility, however, will improve with practice. If you manage to avoid blaming the press, they will seek you out as a credible and desirable source of information.

Blaming journalists won't help you. Look for mistakes in your own work.

Monitor What's Going On Though you're not a politician, your work takes on a political dimension once you step onto the public scene. Therefore be informed! This does not mean that you'll have to read all dailies from cover to cover. Quite the contrary - creativity can be killed by a continuous input of unnecessary and tedious information. But activists are actually threatened by the opposite extreme. They often neglect to keep track of even the most important political events and they live in a vacuum. They lack feedback and knowledge about the manner in which their work impacts the public in a broader social framework. This endangers the work and reputation of the activist.

It is vitally important to communicate with people outside the environmental movement. Share your opinions with average citizens. Don't shut yourself off in an 'environmental ghetto.'

Various Media The press, radio and television (all of which can be further divided according to orientation, frequency of publication, region) all have their own ways of communicating with the public and therefore have differing ways of treating information. Remember this when you work with them!

- **The Press:** the length of sentences isn't necessarily a problem as words can be played with.
- **Radio:** pick the shortest sentences possible and read your speeches out loud beforehand.
- **Television:** prepare a brief speech and an interesting photo opportunity.

Learn from Your Mistakes Monitor how your work affects the public, analyse this work and learn from it. Everyone makes mistakes but only a fool repeats them.

Keep an archive with copies of your articles and important radio and television appearances.

Criticism of the Press

Treat criticism of the press like fire. Criticism can sever contact between yourself, the journalists and the media. Communication may also break down between you and other journalists and your name may be blackened by the media.

Nevertheless it is useful to raise your voice in carefully chosen situations. The following are situations when you should criticise the press: when important information is severely distorted; when untruths or lies are published; when you are misquoted; when an information embargo is broken. **You should not criticise the press for covering opinions other than your own.**

Avoid Direct Confrontation Avoid public confrontation (e.g. don't discuss a problematic article at a press conference or send a response about such an article to all the media). **It is far better to contact the journalist in question or their boss and settle the issue quietly.**

If there is severe misrepresentation, ask that your response be published or that a correction of the original mistake be made. Sue the papers only when you have run out of other options - for instance when irreparable damage has been done to your group's

reputation. A suit should only be filed after consultation with a good lawyer and only when you can be sure to win your case.

Make sure your complaints are well thought-out and complain only if there is very good reason to do so. It is embarrassing for a complainant to blame his or her own failures on the media. Such a situation damages one's reputation as well as that of the whole environmental movement, whether you realise it or not.

WORK WITH MEDIA

PRESS RELEASE

Press Release and Info	<p>Sending in a press release or press information is the easiest and most basic way to address people through the media.</p> <p>Press information should be in the form of a short, simple and factual statement. A press release tends to be longer and may include a point of view, commentary (both by you and other sources) or appendices.</p>
Press Release vs. Press Conference	<p>Press releases are considerably easier to organise than press conferences. With a press release, you avoid the amount of organisation necessary for a conference as well as the storm of questions. However, a single press release has less impact than a press conference. Write press releases whenever you have something fresh and interesting to say. Organise press conferences only when your message is extremely urgent.</p> <p>Remember that the press is overflowing with news and the competition is tough.</p>
	<p>Contents of a Press Release</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heading: your group's logo and contact information (i.e. address, phone and/or fax number, e-mail address). • A clear, catchy title and the date: a question is good - it suggests some level of uncertainty about the issue. • First paragraph: the most important information is - who, what, where, when, and why, in addition to the key message. (In other words, an abstract. This is what will be left after the journalists have shortened the release - too often there is too little space). • The Body: flesh out your introductory statement; include facts (quote sources) and your commentary (use direct speech). • Conclusion: contextualise, give brief background information, and recap. • List of Appendices. • Signature of contact person (contact person or press spokesperson).
Length	<p>A press release should not exceed one page (60 lines) of text. Other relevant information should be added in an appendix.</p>
Appendices	<p>Try not to have too many appendices or journalists will simply ignore them. Pick only the most crucial information. The editor doesn't need to have all the information you have.</p>
Form	<p>Write clear, simple and short sentences; avoid foreign words and complicated grammar. Use direct speech from time to time - it brings an issue to life, and enables you to include opinions and comments, rather than presenting only facts. Use quotation marks correctly to separate direct quotations from the rest of the text.</p> <p>Remember to make your articles graphically attractive. Divide the text neatly and highlight the important parts.</p>

Embargo You can delay the release of an article by using an embargo („Do not publish before...“). This is useful when the action you describe has not yet happened. Too early a release in one medium makes the news less attractive for other media.

Proof-reading Remember to proof-read your writing! (See Chapter 4)

Distribution Keep in mind that the submission deadline for dailies is usually 2:00 PM. If you can't make this deadline, it's better to send the press release the following day, but only if the press release is still fresh and relevant.

Contact 'your' journalist in advance and tell him or her that you plan to submit a press release about a planned event. If possible, send an embargoed press release in beforehand and then authorise its release via telephone once the event has taken place.

It is best to send your releases by fax. Better still are PCs with fax-modem cards, as releases can be sent automatically to all listed numbers. Follow up the faxing with phone calls to make sure that your faxes made it into the right hands.

Reaction Your follow-up call also draws the journalists' attention to the press release. Over the phone, you can answer any questions s/he may have.

Expect a reaction from the press. After sending in the press release, make yourself available for questions.

5. 2 RADIO

The Ideal Partner for Radio is an excellent tool for a local campaign, and can help your group build a good image.

You Radio is more personal, more flexible and quicker than newsprint. While newsprint conveys written and mediated commentary as well as photographs, the radio can help convey your personality.

Radio coverage is easier and far more flexible than television. You can contact the radio station by phone, or even from the field with as little as one person and a tape recorder.

You will find that radio provides you with many more opportunities for comments.

Regional Stations Regional radio stations provide useful time slots and ample air time. Newly established private stations seek out interesting people and will be pleased to have a contact for you. The variety of radio stations allows you to choose the appropriate station to address your desired audience.

Regional radio stations have a large audience, which during the day is far bigger than the television audience. What's more, unconventional young people are among your listening audience, and they are your potential partners.

5.2.1 Opportunity

Active opportunity: you contact the radio (send in a press release, offer an interview, ask that the public be invited to an event over the air, etc.)

Passive opportunity: you are asked to make a statement or are invited for an interview by the radio station.

Comments If you are asked to give your opinion about a current event, make sure you are capable of providing well-informed commentary. If you are insufficiently informed about the issue, advise the journalist to contact an expert, preferably from your organisation (see Chapter 4 - 'No Comment'). Be quick in making this decision, otherwise you might miss your chance.

Interview Make sure you are clear about the content and form of the interview. You will want to know the following things:

- what would they like you to comment on?

- who will participate in the interview?
- where will the interview take place? (in the studio, in the field - at the action, over the phone...)
- what will the approximate length of the interview be?
- will the interview be live or pre-recorded?

Live Transmission Live transmission has several forms:

- an ordinary **dialogue between two people** in the studio
- a **panel discussion**

advantages: interesting for the audience;
allows you time to prepare answers while others are speaking.

disadvantages: gives you less space - you need to fight more to get a word in;
confrontational, only an experienced rhetorician should debate directly with a strong opponent.

- a **telephone interview**: there is less psychological pressure, but this type of interview is rather impersonal and tends to have a low transmission quality (enunciate carefully).

Recorded Transmission Recorded and edited programs provide the time to clarify convoluted statements but the immediacy is lost. Also, important parts can be cut out and meanings can be distorted by splicing the interview in the wrong places.

Advice Arrive on time!

Be brief. Interviews are usually no longer than a couple of minutes. Concentrate on the most important points to make best use of the time. The interview will be over before you know it and it will be very unfortunate if by the end you haven't even gotten to your main points.

Speak clearly and deliberately, enunciate properly, speak into the microphone. Do not use long sentences.

5.2.2. Preparation

Interview Outline Before you have learned to give good spontaneous answers, think carefully before the interview about the following points:

- what do you want to say? (the goal)
- how will you communicate your main points?
- what are the important facts?

Try to rehearse the interview (simulate it). You will probably conclude that it is best to use plain and simple language.

What to Say What is your agenda in the interview? To communicate information? To attack an opponent (a company or individual)? To mobilise people into action? To reveal a controversial affair? Make sure you know:

- the problem and the entity responsible for it
- the solution
- how your audience should get involved

How to Say It The content and the form of the message matters more on the radio than in a written text. Make sure the audience is affected by your speech! Present your story in such a way that your audience will remember it like its own.

Adding wit, humour, unique examples, interesting language, a description of real and well-known places and/or people, will all help to make your radio appearance memorable.

Facts Make sure you are on top of all the key information and arguments, even if you only use a fragment of the information in the interview. It is more important to be well-acquainted with the issue first and later to concentrate on your style of speech. But don't get unnecessarily nervous about talking on the radio - the journalist and the audience know much less than you do about the topic.

Simulate Do a few practice runs before your public appearance. These dry runs may provide valuable insight into your potential weaknesses on the air.

Prepare your own 'Ideal Scenario', but also be prepared for a worst case scenario, by thinking through which kinds of surprising and unnerving questions could be posed. How will you make positive use of a potentially negative situation? How will you avoid answering questions you cannot or do not want to respond to?

5.2.3 Interview

Sound Check There will be a sound check before the actual interview. Speak naturally, the way you intend to speak during the interview. Speak directly into the microphone!

Warm-up Talk Use the time before the formal interview to get the journalist's contact and to become as clear as possible about the actual interview. This is your last chance to share your aims and priorities with the interviewer, to decide together on a 'scenario'.

Stage Fright Do not ignore nervous symptoms; instead learn to master them. Breathe deeply, speak slowly, ask for something to drink. Experienced competitive runners will tell you that some pre-run nervousness is fine whereas absolute calmness, on the other hand, is undesirable; controlled release of adrenaline will improve your performance.

Who Leads the Interview The interview is generally shaped by the journalist's questions, but you too can take a certain amount of control. You will look foolish if you start speaking about issues that you weren't asked about, but you can, without appearing aggressive, cleverly slip in points you feel are important.

- How to Speak**
- State clearly and at the outset the most important issues.
 - Speak in a natural conversational tone, with changes in speed and pitch. The audience cannot see you; you will have to make up for this by giving them a good listening experience instead.
 - Use interesting language, but avoid literary terms or slang. Never be rude or vulgar.
 - Be careful if you are not comfortable with specialised or loaded terminology. Stylised speech will tire you down and will also be obvious to your audience. Use humour if there is room to do so.
 - Use examples.
 - Don't be afraid to use shocking information, if it is true. Don't bore the audience with too much technical information or terminology. Don't get caught in a monologue, and don't start babbling uncontrollably. The ideal length for an answer is about 15 to 20 seconds!
 - Repeat important points and approach them from different angles.
 - Avoid fillers and unnecessary words.
 - Do not read from a text - this sounds cold and unnatural.
 - Avoid making noise in the studio (rustling paper, etc.)

- Confusion** If, under stress, you have said something nonsensical or false, stop and correct the whole statement. If you think the error was not that big, resign yourself to it and hope it slips by the listeners (this is usually what happens anyway.)
- Memory Block** Very rarely does one have a total memory block. If this happens, don't panic, your memory will come back. In a pre-recorded interview, let the journalist know when you've regained your memory. If you are doing a live interview, the journalist is likely to help by posing a new question.
- Inaccuracies** If the interviewer is unfamiliar with your topic and this causes him or her to make a grossly inaccurate statement, correct them if you can do so easily and politely. Otherwise ignore the error and hope you can correct it later within your speech.
- Digression** If the journalist severely digresses from the agreed upon topic, politely make it clear to him or her and return to the central topic.
- Confrontation** A real clash of opinions is very rare in an interview, though there are often clashes in panel discussions. Interviewers can be tough in order to make a show more attractive because it is the nature of media to show conflict and create drama. Be fearless but not cheeky, never let anyone put you on the defensive.
- Don't allow anyone to make you say things you will later regret. Don't let yourself be provoked, even under hostile or aggressive circumstances. You could lose your reputation with the audience.
- If the journalist interrupts your speech with aggressive questions, stay centered and without hesitating calmly finish your points.
- Make all potentially aggressive situations work to your benefit. If the interviewer tries to make you look too radical, don't try to convince him or her that you're not - from a psychological point of view this will look like you've taken the defensive. Back up your point of view with a friendly but assertive statement, along the following lines: „It's the other way around: It would be dangerous to just go on talking about it. What we need here is action...“

5.2.4 Aftermath

- Learn** Ask for a recording of the interview, analyse it and learn from your mistakes. Listen to other radio interviews with a critical ear, to learn from them as well.
- Tape record practice interviews with your colleagues.
- Remember that journalists need you the same way you need them. If you prove to be a good interviewee, they will gladly contact you again.

5.3 PRESS CONFERENCE

- Reasons** A press conference, like a direct action, is an extraordinary tactical tool. Organise one only if you have a really important reason for doing so (see Chapter 5.1).
- Are you at a milestone in your work, in your campaign? Or are you beginning an entirely new project? These are reasons for holding a conference. Remember that if you hold press conferences too often, journalists will lose interest and your reputation will slowly go downhill.
- A press conference is organised by the group's spokesperson or the person responsible for the issue at hand.
- Types of Conference**
- **Planned:** to comment about an anticipated event (e.g. completion of a case study, a government decision).
 - **Forced:** to share immediate reactions to an unplanned event (such as an ecological disaster caused by an industrial accident).

- **Regular:** these are for larger organisations, who usually keep the media abreast of their activities, in addition to commenting on current social and political events.

Scheduling

1. Think about the reason for the conference and the issues that need to be covered.
2. Choose the appropriate participants and find out when they are available.
3. Pick a suitable date (avoid double booking with other important events or conferences - consult a press agency) and time (best is before noon, due to press submission deadlines; do not schedule a conference in the early morning hours or on a weekend). It is best to schedule the conference at a time when there is little news - during the summer vacation or the first few weeks in January.
4. Choose and book a suitable location (your organisation's head office, the city press centre). It is best to use one location regularly; in exceptional cases the conference can be held in the field, at the location of the event.
5. Invite the participants in good time (VIP's at least one month in advance).
6. Invite journalists (send the information to the press agency service centre first, then to the individual offices or journalists; invite people at least one week in advance). Remind them the day before the conference. Sometimes it will suffice to let the press agencies know about the press conference, but it's wise to call the most important journalists personally. **The invitation should include the contact for your organisation, the location, time and topic of the conference.** It should also list the participants and give a brief summary of the topic (something to entice people to attend).
7. Organise a meeting of the participants to discuss the programme.
8. Prepare a press information kit or a press release and additional materials for the journalists.
9. One or two days in advance, phone all the participants to double check that they will actually attend conference.

Preparation Time

This depends on the type of conference you are organising (see Chapter 4):

Planned: The press conference should be announced at least 3 days in advance, though this time period should mainly be determined by the number of invited guests and their schedules.

Forced: If a rapid reaction is of crucial importance, organise the conference as expediently as possible.

5.3.1. List of Participants for a Press Conference

Participants and Their Roles

- your spokesperson (moderates the conference)
- the person in your organisation responsible for the campaign or issue (is the key speaker)
- an expert (who shares the opinion of your organisation)
- a celebrity (if active in the matter)
- an opponent (e.g. a company representative)
- a government representative or politician (someone with a certain amount of knowledge about the issue)

Guests

You should know your guests and what you can expect from them (e.g. some people speak slowly and elaborately and you often have to cut them off; others tend to digress from the main issues). The more well-known they are and the more public positions they hold, the better.

Allies and Opponents **Invite partner organisations working on the issue.** Also feel free to invite opponents if they are well aware of the issue and if you know what to expect from them.

Journalists want to know different sides of an issue, so they will appreciate if you make it easier for them by representing these various views on the spot.

Be careful that your opponents don't dominate your press conference.

There should be no more than three guests, otherwise you will not have enough space for your statement. (A more suitable way of presenting a wider array of views is a roundtable discussion.)

5.3.2 Last Minute Details and Conference Schedule

- room preparation, technical preparation
 - preparation of additional printed matter for the journalists
 - last-minute scenario details, order of seats, participant name-plates
 - start on time!
 - opening welcome and introduction to the participants and the topic, as well as the views of your organisation
 - guests' opinions
- until now, we've only been talking about the introduction to the conference, which should not exceed twenty minutes!*
- journalists' questions
 - closing
 - time for documentation (filming, photographing)
 - individual interviews for the media

Lively Presentation Accompany the speeches with films, photographs, expert analyses, official documents, etc.

tion Decorate the room with objects that relate to the topic (photographs, copies of documents...) to make for more interesting TV shots and photographs.

Remember the refreshments! Have mineral water available for the speakers and the guests, and if possible, hors d'oeuvres for all the participants.

Length **The ideal length of a presentation is 20 minutes** (this depends, of course, on the topic and the number of guests). Time should remain for a question period. The entire conference should take no longer than one hour, the exception being if the audience is brimming with unanswered questions. Stretched-out conferences with long, drawn-out monologues need to be avoided as journalists leave before the question period even begins, and no time is left for one-on-one interviews.

Negotiate the length of individual speeches while discussing scenario details. The moderator has the right to politely interrupt long-winded speakers. These speakers will find it helpful if watches are placed in front of them, to keep an eye on the time.

Mistakes to Avoid

- rehashing old information
- unclear points, confused content
- too many topics presented at once - information overload
- jumping from one topic to another
- lengthy and dull monologues by the speakers - not enough time for questions
- omission of final one-on-one interviews

5.4 GRAPHICS FOR ACTIONS

- Image** Visual images affect people more than ordinary written or spoken language. Photo and film documentation of actions is therefore very important. (The word 'action' is used here to mean everything ranging from a press conference to a blockade.) Plan your actions so that they are interesting both in terms of information and visuals.
- Field Inspection** Look around the location through the eyes of a photographer (preferably right through a camera lens). Think about the placement of static objects (landscape, buildings) and moving objects (people, banners) in order to obtain the best graphic layout. Even a press conference room can be made to look good (see Chapter 5.3).
- Colours** Remember that the colours you choose must work in a black and white format; newspapers tend to have only black and white pictures (e.g. green letters on a red background blend together into one in a black and white format). It is best to take a couple pictures of the place in advance to get a good idea of how pictures with people and objects may turn out. Choose the colour of your clothing and banners according to the background.
- What a Picture Should Show** A photograph should be able to show:
- where the action took place (a recognisable background)
 - why the action took place there: include the symbol of the 'enemy', e.g. a polluter (a factory chimney or a sewage opening) or an institution (its head office with a title or logo)
 - the person or group who organised the action
- It should also show the banner (if there is one at the action), which should be large and legible enough for both the action and the photograph; it should state 'why' and 'who'. Beware of long banners - they may not fit into a picture.
- Demonstrate threats to wildlife or health and other problems with tell-all clothing; but choose your clothing carefully as you do not want to overdo a statement. Think of the public's boundaries of tolerance so you don't come across as all rage.

6. PUBLIC OPINION AND YOUR REPUTATION

- Affecting the Public** *Read the first paragraph of the foreword again and write the following a hundred times: 'A well-planned, positive influence on the public should be a central priority in our work. We believe in balancing our work with our presentation.'*
- Though the above motto is an important one, the reality is that an activist's focus is generally different. Many activists work too much and underestimate the presentation of their work. You too are responsible when your goals are far removed from what the public considers important.
- Activists are naturally threatened by the possibility that they will become submersed by their problems and the problems of their community. It is good to keep this risk in mind. Activists tend to underestimate contact with the public and as a result their work in this area tends to be poor.
- Good Reputation** How well you manage to get people on your side depends not only on your goals but on yourselves as well. You will only succeed in building a positive reputation for your organisation through purposeful and continuous work, good tactical skills and a credible performance.
- In addition to balancing your work with the presentation, try also to balance your social ambitions, your real activity and the public presentation of your whole organisation. You don't live in a vacuum: your group image is not only a reflection of your own

activity but also of social forces. Therefore, stay on top of political events! (see Chapter 4).

Public Relations You will need a wide variety of tools to work with the public: your own publications, cooperation of public authorities, protest actions, cultural events, bridges between like-minded communities, personal contacts and others. The most frequently used tool, however, is the media.

Resignation or Activity? Some activists underestimate the press because they have no experience with it. Others, experienced already, despise cooperation with the media because it is responsible for spreading oversimplified, distorted and superficial information. Though this is often the case, it is not reason enough to resign from this type of work.

Seeking reserves for yourself will help you a lot more than criticising the press. If you don't want to remain enclosed in a small circle of converts, but wish to broaden your influence, you will need to do media work. If you don't work with the press, it will work you over! So you'd better adopt an active, creative attitude.

The media is an indispensable help, especially at actions.

Without the media, you won't be able to share your opinions about an issue with the public, initiate a public discussion, or apply political pressure to make necessary changes.

Creative Attitude Your organisation's positive reputation is upheld by purposeful and continuous cooperation with the press, stemming from personal contacts with journalists dealing with your issues.

Supply the media continually with information, statements and comments. Only by so doing can you construct a complex and positive media image for your group. Do not rely on the publicity of ad hoc actions.

Feedback Not only is publicity important for your work, it also gives you feedback. Nonetheless, it also tends to be underestimated by activists, who tend to ignore, or at least overlook, the public impact of their work. However, this skill can help you plan upcoming tactics and working strategies. If you lack correctives for this planning, you will have problems in attaining your vision.

Be Persuasive Be aware. Like everything else, media work and public influence needs some qualification. Activists tend to recognise this only after a long, painful experiential process. Study psychology, communications and the media, improve your writing and public speaking skills.

Be credible. You need to be experienced as well as knowledgeable to convince the public about an issue. Your work and your public appearances should be in line with your personal life.