



# Ohio Gas Association

## Dealing With the News Media After An Incident

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# AEGIS

## Background Information

- Utility Mutual Insurance Company (member owned)
- Formed in 1975 by 22 gas utilities
- Electric Utilities began joining in 1977
- 490 members – 95% utilities and related energy

## **Natural Gas Incidents or Suspected Incidents**

**Natural Gas is a very safe product and natural gas related incidents are few and far between, which is good. This can lead to a problem because when an incident does occur sometimes a gas company does not know what to do as they have no experience. Emergency Response pre-planning and the use of Mock Emergency Drills can be a tremendous help**



# **AEGIS Investigating Natural Gas Incident Workshops**

Upcoming Workshops:

**January 20 & 22 PG&E San Francisco**

**April 8 KUB Knoxville, TN**

**July 9 UGI Harrisburg, PA**

**September 22 ONEOK Austin, TX**

To register go to the AEGIS website:

**[www.aegislink.com](http://www.aegislink.com)**

# The Miranda Warning

**“Anything you say may be used against you in a court of law.....”**

**“Loose Lips, Lose, Lawsuits”**

## **Basic Precepts When Dealing With the Media**

- **Publics initial impression will carry forward**
- **Don't be "tried" by the media**
- **The media will get a story, make sure it is accurate and the correct story**
- **Always be polite, calm and assertive**
- **Always focus on the fact that the gas companies main job is getting the gas to the burner tip in the most efficient and**

# Designate One Spokesperson and Stick To It

- **Usually the company Communications or Public Relations Director**
- **Company personnel instructed to refer inquiries to spokesperson**
- **Person should be easily accessible**
- **Develop Message Points (work with your attorney)**
- **Spokesperson must be part of team - in the loop**

# Do's and Don'ts When Dealing With the Media

- **Do** be honest and accurate, the credibility of the company depends on it.
- **Do** assume that everything you say is on the record
- **Do** avoid using jargon i.e. CGI refer to it as a Gas Detector.
- **Do** have an initial statement “The incident is being investigated and we will get back to you when we have more information”
- **Do** be aware of your surroundings and your audience i.e. credentials

# Do's and Don'ts When Dealing With the Media

- **Don't** lie - EVER
- **Don't** say “No Comment” – EVER
- **Don't** improvise, don't speculate and don't guess
- **Don't** give specifics unless you can verify/document with facts
- **Don't** share information with outside parties unless directed to do so
- **Don't** place blame

# Gas Company Spokesperson

- **Statements should be prepared in advance with input from upper management and legal.**
- **Statements should be in writing and read verbatim**
- **If questions are to be answered, make sure the appropriate personnel are available to answer technical questions and they must be briefed in advance**
- **Make sure that statements are consistent with fire or police**

## Helpful Tip

**Develop a rapport with your local Fire and Police departments in advance. Your worst nightmare is to be on the incident scene and the Incident Commander will not give you access to the scene. Remember once the Fire Department is on the scene they are in charge. Develop the rapport so that they trust you to secure the gas and you rely on them to secure the area and you both worked towards the common goal of PUBLIC SAFETY.**

# Gas Company Spokesperson

- **Ask to review materials to be used by the media in their stories for accuracy**
- **If you are misquoted in a story or if misinformation is given, act promptly and speak to the reporter**
- **Don't make threats, talk with their editor**
- **Have your facts, and expect that everything you say in correcting the mistake to be on the record**

**(Veteran gas company spokesperson was quoted in a major newspaper “The people are not smelling natural gas in their home they are smelling the odorant that we add to the gas”.)**

# Statements that Gas Companies wish they had not made

A person was killed this past winter in a natural gas explosion, the gas company was on the scene for 4 hours prior to the incident. Statement 3 days later by the gas company:

**“We did nothing wrong as we followed our procedures”.**

(The gas companies procedures stated that “if gas readings are detected near the foundation an inside investigation must be performed”. No one had checked inside with a CGI.)

# Statements that Gas Companies wish they had not made

**A person was killed in a natural gas explosion due to an underground coupling that had separated.**

**Statement issued 2 days later by the gas company:**

**“This was the first such failure that we have had with this particular coupling”.**

**(Due to pressure by the media the gas company researched and found that they had over 2 dozen failures with this type of coupling).**

# Statements that Gas Companies wish they had not made

**Statement made by gas company spokesperson 4 hours after a contractor dug into a gas service and pulled it out a coupling near the house causing the explosion and injuries to 2 people:**

**“We have had trouble with this contractor before, he just rips and tears”.**

**(The investigation the following day revealed that the contractor had called for a locate and the service was miss-located by the gas company’s locating contractor.)**

# QUESTIONS?

## **AEGIS Insurance Services**

## **Thank You**