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TO: Executive Addressed

FR: James E. Lukaszewski, APR Chairman

RE: What Reporters Always Ask When Something Happens

News stories often begin at the scene of an incident, problem, or situation. For supervisors and those individuals likely to be "on the spot" when the media arrive, being comfortable in answering reporters' questions means recognizing that the same set of questions is always asked.

The questions are the same no matter which medium the reporter represents radio, television, newspaper, or magazine.

If the spokesperson is unprepared, news stories will be the result of follow-up questions generated by the unprepared answers to the reporter's first two or three questions. Recognizing the questioning patterns reporters follow in these situations will eliminate the feeling of surprise and reduce interview mistakes because you will already know what the reporter will ask next.

Here are the questions reporters initially ask at the scene of an incident or situation:

1. What happened?
2. When did it happen?
3. Who did it happen to?
4. What was the cause?
5. Were there any injuries? How bad were they?
6. How much damage has been caused?
7. What's the potential for continued damage or danger?
8. What went wrong?
9. Who's responsible?
10. What do you plan to do about it?
11. When will more information be available?
12. Can we interview the victims?
13. Have you notified the next of kin?

While company policies vary, being able to positively, factually, and quickly respond to this basic set of questions will satisfy the media and minimize the potential damage to company reputation and credibility until more definitive information is available or a senior spokesperson arrives at the scene.

There are other sets of more specific questions reporters ask when there are casualties, property damage, rescue relief efforts, legal ramifications, and evacuations. If you'd like a list of questions related to these topics, please write or call The Lukaszewski Group.

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