MEDIA RELEASE PROTOCOL

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In the past, the ASC discussion list has received many complaints from professional science communicators about the manner in which media releases are distributed via email. This protocol is intended to help science communicators, especially those new to the profession and whose job involves posting media releases electronically, to distribute their releases with maximum effect.

Accordingly, the following procedures are suggested as a series of "do" and "don't" points, in no particular order, with each accompanied by a numbered explanation. Such a construction also allows for additional (or even alternative) points of view.

1. Don't send media releases as attachments
    A. Many journalists, freelance and otherwise, have slow computers, may not have Broadband or are allocated restricted room in their corporate electronic mailboxes. They can be infuriated by attachments that slow their machines down or which clog their mailboxes. It can then take them time and trouble to get into their servers to delete the attachments at source, and those attachments remain unread.
    B. Cautious journalists will often not open an attachment from an unknown source as it may contain a virus. They routinely discard all such attachments unread.
2. Send media releases in the body of your email without complex fonts or additional included material such as colourful headings, elaborate signatures etc.
    A. This method of delivery uses the least amount of computer memory and allows a journalist to forward or reply to the email readily.
3. Don't attach photographs or other documents to emailed media releases, even if the releases themselves are in email form.

A. Photographs, especially of publishable quality, can take a huge amount of time to download on slow systems. They present even greater problems than attached media releases in slowing systems, clogging mailboxes and being discarded unread because of the danger of viruses. They should not be sent unsolicited.

B. Some journalists are happy to receive attached photographs (and other attachments), but that should be determined before these are sent. The default guideline is not to send unsolicited attachments.

4. Make photographs (and similar) available through a dedicated website.

A. Media releases often offer photographs where suitable, as these may greatly increase the chance of having a story accepted. An appropriate way of doing this is as follows.

   i. Set up (or use an existing) website, such as a dedicated Media Unit website or a section of a corporate website easily identified as one for journalists' access.

   ii. Place photographs on this website, in thumbnail form, with a link that allows journalists to download any photograph that they want.

   iii. Ensure that the photographs for download are of publishable quality; 300 dpi or better.

   iv. Cross-reference any photographs to the media release by name and date.

   v. Identify the subject of the photograph by name, title, brief caption etc. Include on the website the conditions under which media may use the photograph (usually for no fee, but with acknowledgement to corporation or photographer).

   vi. At the bottom of your emailed media release, place a line that says something like "Photograph(s) available at <website address>" The website address should ideally be a hot link so that clicking on it takes the journalist directly to the photographs.

5. Suppress the list of recipients of your emailed media releases

    A. Your email application should offer options such as 'Undisclosed Recipients" "Bcc" or similar. If you are not familiar with how to invoke this option, get advice or consult your HELP guide for the application. This option sends your emails to as many people as you like without revealing their identities to each other.

    B. Leaving the list of recipients open (i.e. Disclosed; To…; Cc…) means that it will be copied inappropriately, for example by spammers, and increase the chance that the recipients will attract nuisance emails, even viruses. Journalists are justifiably annoyed if this happens, and may well identify you as the source of their problems.

    C. Leaving the list of recipients open means that it will be copied by others who are sending out media releases and used by them. Many journalists don't want to receive a wide range of releases, only those dealing with their speciality, locality or similar. They may resent having their contacts widely broadcast, and this could work against your interests.

    D. Journalists change jobs or positions frequently. Their email contacts become outdated, and simply copying lists of contacts, or allowing your own list of contacts to be copied, means that many of these incorrect contacts become entrenched in widely circulated lists, causing various problems.

6. If publicising an event or similar, identify the state where it is to take place in the subject heading of your email.

    A. Journalists receive many emails, and anything that allows them to discard unwanted or irrelevant emails without spending time on them is welcome. If they have to open your email about an event and read it in order to discover at the end that it is in a distant state, they will probably be irritated. If you advertise the state of your event in the email subject, those to whom your email will not apply will be able to discard it without wasting time on opening it in order to read information that they cannot then use.