

During an Interview Tips

Get your messages across

Take the initiative. You are the expert. You know what is important to tell the public, so tell them.

Be informative, not conversational

News interviews are exchanges of information. You are the source of that information; the reporter represents the public. Beware of the reporter who remains silent, encouraging you to ramble or dilute your original message.

Be brief

Reporters generally don't want lengthy, drawn-out explanations. They're looking for quotable quotes – a punchy line that will fill three lines of newsprint or 20 seconds of air time. Use your 20 seconds to get your message across, and there's much more likelihood it will be used.

Don't go off the record

There is no such thing as off the record. An "off-the-record" comment may not be attributed to you directly, but the reporter often will use the information to confirm a story with other sources. If you don't want something to appear in print, don't say it.

Know your role

When you are conducting an interview, understand your role. Remember that reporters will not distinguish between personal opinion and your organization's position – and neither will the public. Answer questions appropriately.

Don't use jargon

Avoid using terms or acronyms that cannot be quoted without explanation. Also, avoid using complicated explanations.

Don't say: "AFVs are as safe as conventional vehicles."

Do say: "Alternative fuel vehicles are as safe as conventional vehicles."

Say what you mean

Avoid bureaucratic language such as "It is clear that time and cooperation will be needed to provide first responders with the quality alternative fuel vehicle training they deserve in order for them to gain a complete understanding of the issue." Instead, say, "We're working on delivering quality training to first responders across the nation."

Tell the truth

The truth may hurt, but lies are deadly. Give a direct answer when asked a direct question even if the answer is "No," "I don't know," or "I'm sorry, I can't answer that question."

Be patient

Reporters are not experts in your field. You may have to start at the beginning to help them understand an issue.

Don't lose your temper

Sometimes reporters are intentionally rude to elicit a charged response. Do not fall into the trap. Respond politely, in control at all times.

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Don't answer a question with a question

The reporter asks, "What do you think is the danger in dealing with alternative fuel vehicles?" Don't say, "What do you mean by the danger with these vehicles?" or "What do you think about it?" Such responses come across as evasive, negative, or hostile.

"No comment"

Don't say "No comment" or "I can neither confirm nor deny." The public views this as "I know, but I won't say." Instead, tell the reporter that you are unable to comment and, if possible, why. Offer to get the information for the reporter if possible and if he or she is interested.

Don't answer when you shouldn't

If you know the answer to a question but can't say, don't hesitate to refer the reporter to the NAFTC or other appropriate organization or individual.

Don't guess

If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. Be sure you offer to find the answer or find someone else who knows. Don't guess, thinking the reporter will check elsewhere. There's a good chance your misinformation will appear in print.

It's okay to make a mistake

If the tape is rolling and you realize you've made a mistake, or, more likely, if you suddenly find you have no idea what you're saying, stop. Say, "I'm sorry, I haven't answered your question very well. Let me back up." The reporter usually will prefer your new, crisp response.

Be prepared to repeat yourself

Reporters may repeat their question because your answer was too long or too complex; they didn't understand you; or they're simply trying to get a more concise response. Welcome the question as another opportunity to state your message, perhaps more clearly.

Be confident

You're the expert. You have a message to deliver. Recognize that reporters in fact may be somewhat intimidated by your expertise or position. Put them at ease.

Don't be defensive

Make positive statements instead of denying or refuting comments from others. State your message; let others speak for themselves.

Be aware of when you are being taped

In broadcast situations, such as in the studio or when talking to a radio reporter, assume that everything you say is being recorded.

Avoid reading from prepared statements

This is especially true when you are on camera. You are the expert and ought to know what you want to say without a script.