

## Module 2

### *How to Assemble a Press Kit*



THE SOUTHERN CENTER FOR

**Communication, Health & Poverty**

## Background

---

This module takes you through the processing of developing a press kit. A press kit is a pre-packaged set of materials distributed to members of the media. Providing a reporter with the right information should be your first step in introducing your program, event or research finding to the newsroom. Providing the media with a press kit keeps you from having to cold-call reporters, and also allows them to have your contact and other information handy.

**Resources:** The following section was adapted from two resources. The first is “The Guide to Working with the Media” published by The Corporation for National and Service Learning. ([www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/Media\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/Media_Guide.pdf)). The second is “Emergency Risk Communication for Public Health Practitioners” developed by the Northwest Center for Public Health Practice ([www.nwcphp.org/training/courses-exercises/courses/risk-communication](http://www.nwcphp.org/training/courses-exercises/courses/risk-communication)). *Special thanks to Thom Berry from the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control for providing sample press kit materials.*

## What is in a press kit?

---

Press kits are sent out to media outlets to provide reporters with background and context for stories they may cover. Press kits may include a news release, biographical sketches of key personnel, organizational information, news clippings, brochures, newsletters, photographs, statistics, fact sheets, budgets, contact information and other information.

Typically press kits include at least the following materials:

1. One-page letter inviting a reporter to cover the story
2. One-page background information on your organization
3. One-page background information on the topic at hand (news release)
4. Previously published (positive) news clippings about your organization or topic at hand

Situations that call for a press kit:

- To announce a news release
- Organization is issuing a policy statement
- When relaying information during a crisis
- To introduce key personnel or organizational changes
- To announce an event (i.e. community meeting or fundraising event)

Examples of online press kits are available at American Public Health Association ([www.apha.org/about/news/presskit/](http://www.apha.org/about/news/presskit/)) and Georgia Human Resources ([www.dhr.georgia.gov](http://www.dhr.georgia.gov)).

## Press kit example

---

To provide an example of what to include in a press kit, we use a 2005 train accident in Graniteville, South Carolina. This accident resulted in a chlorine gas leak which endangered the

**DO NOT QUOTE OR REPRODUCE**    contact drubin@uga.edu

health and lives of people in the community. On the following pages are the components of a press kit including a news release, fact sheet, summary statement and news clippings.

**Component 1: News release announcing ongoing health screenings for survivors of a toxic spill** (Source: Thom Berry, South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Jan. 3, 2008

**Graniteville community health tracking continues**

COLUMBIA – As the third anniversary of the Graniteville train crash and chlorine spill that killed nine and forced thousands from their Aiken County homes nears, work continues to track the health of those affected by the event, the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control reported today.

“The Graniteville Recovery and Chlorine Epidemiology project is a unique partnership among the community and its churches with the University of South Carolina and DHEC,” said Erik Svendsen, Ph.D., epidemiologist with DHEC’s Bureau of Disease Control. “The goals of the GRACE project are to reduce the impact of the event on the community, identify people who need medical care and get them to local physicians for the care they need.”

Svendsen said findings of the project include:

- An area health registry has 958 enrollees with 259 screenings done in 2005 and an additional 81 in 2007.
- The registry identified 256 more injured people bringing the total number of victims to 1,384 with 851 who received medical attention immediately following the event.
- Fifty-five percent of the people seen during the first round of screenings were recommended for additional follow-up medical care for at least one condition
- Over half of the people screened during the first round tested positive for some type of decreased lung function.
- Just over 26 percent of those screened during the first round had some form of inflammation in their airways.
- Nearly a third of those checked in the first round showed evidence of possible conditions such as asthma.
- Three people who claimed to be non-smokers had airway blockages that could have been caused by emphysema.
- Just over 26 percent of those who were screened in the first round had a significant loss of lung function but did not know it.
- Nearly 41 percent of the people screened showed evidence of post-traumatic stress disorder.
- Eight people died from various causes since the event: four from cardiovascular disease, two from emphysema, one from pneumonia and one suicide. Chlorine injury was not listed as a contributor to any of the deaths.

Svendsen said anyone who lived or worked in Graniteville, traveled through the community or responded to the events on Jan. 6, 2005 can join the health registry by calling the Aiken County Helpline at 2-1-1 to register.

“We remain committed to the people of Graniteville by tracking their health status in the community and its schools,” he said. “One of the ways we hope to achieve this is by establishing a health resource center.”

Svendsen said community residents have been encouraged to voice their concerns and become active in the Graniteville Community Coalition.

“We know there was a short-term epidemic of injuries resulting from the event,” he said. “The project aims to prevent a long-term epidemic of disease that can be traced back to the events of January 6, 2005.”

-###-

**For more information:** Thom Berry – (803) 898-3885  
e-mail – berrytw@dhec.sc.gov

**Component 2: One page background information on the organization managing this story**  
(Source: South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC))



The graphic features the DHEC logo on the left, consisting of three squares with icons: a caduceus, a tree, and a map of South Carolina. Below the squares are the words 'PROMOTE', 'PROTECT', and 'PROSPER'. To the right of the logo is the text 'Fact Sheet' in a large, bold, serif font. Below the logo and text is a black banner with white text: 'SC Department of Health and Environmental Control • 2600 Bull Street • www.scdhec.net • Promoting and protecting the health of the public and the environment.'

## S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control

The S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control was formed in 1973 from the merger of the State Board of Health and the Pollution Control Authority.

DHEC is a centralized public health agency in that it operates the 46 county health departments around the state. This is done through a system of eight regional offices for both public health and environmental protection programs.

The agency's mission is to promote and protect the health of the public and the environment. Our vision is for healthy people living in healthy communities.

Some of our services are available to all South Carolinians while others have eligibility requirements. Many are free, while others carry a small charge to help cover expenses. DHEC is also the state's official vital records keepers for such documents as birth and death certificates.

Along with the agency's environmental programs, DHEC operates the state's coastal zone management program through field offices located along the coast.

DHEC is not a cabinet agency with a director appointed by the governor. The S.C. Board of Health and Environmental Control oversees the agency's operations and appoints a commissioner who manages the day-to-day functions of the agency. The seven board members are chosen by the governor to represent the state's congressional districts with the advice and consent of the State Senate.

The agency has approximately 4,300 full time employees, most of whom work in the health department clinics around the state.

You might also consider including a document detailing the topic at hand. Next is an example of a summary statement from the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control.

**Component 3: Summary statement** (Source: Thom Berry, South Carolina, DHEC)

**Summary: Public Health and Environmental Emergency Response to the Graniteville Train Wreck  
January 31, 2005**

At 2:39 AM on Thursday, January 6, 2005, a 42 car Norfolk Southern train wrecked in Graniteville. The rupture of a tanker car resulted in the release of approximately 60 tons of chlorine vapors in the vicinity of the Avondale textile mill complex, the commercial district and residential areas in Graniteville.

The immediate priority for the Graniteville-Vaucluse-Warrenton Fire Departments and Aiken County Sheriff's Office was the protection of human life. Emergency responders in protective clothing assisted in evacuating individuals from the immediate area of the release. Nearby residents were instructed through emergency alert messages and news media reports to shelter in place: remain indoors, close windows and doors, and turn off heat and air conditioning units.

First notification to DHEC came at 3:50 a.m. Fifteen minutes later, the first local response from DHEC's Edisto Savannah Environmental Quality Control district, began. By 4:30 a.m., staff from DHEC's Bureau of Land and Waste Management's Emergency Response Team and the Commissioner's Office Division of Media Relations were en route. A full response team arrived at 7:40 a.m.

DHEC was heavily involved in the environmental emergency response, coordination of health and medical services, public information and risk communication activities.

Environmental response activities included entry into the "hot zone" to evaluate the characteristics of the release and its hazards, to conduct plume modeling and evacuation planning, to assess environmental impacts, and to monitor conditions in the area. Air sampling continued throughout the event. DHEC staff monitored and supervised the clean up of the crash site.

This mass casualty event required decontamination, triage and treatment of large numbers of people coordinating emergency medical services, hospital care and disaster mortuary services.

Decontamination sites were set up at USC Aiken at approximately 6:55 AM, and at Midland Valley High School. DHEC personnel assisted EMS personnel with medical evaluation at the decontamination sites.

Shelters began opening during the morning at USC Aiken, Midland Valley High School, South Aiken High School, First Baptist Church, and the May's Community Center in Augusta. DHEC provided nursing staff for Midland Valley, South Aiken and a Special Medical Needs Shelter.

Governor Mark Sanford declared a State of Emergency at Noon Jan. 6.

The emergency response to this event was coordinated through a unified command of authorities. An incident command post was established in West Aiken. At one point, more than 100 government agencies and other organizations were involved in the response.

A mandatory evacuation of the one-mile zone was ordered by local authorities. House-to-house checks in the vicinity were undertaken to implement the evacuation. Over 5,400 people were evacuated from a one-mile radius of the wreck site. A curfew from 6:00 p.m. until 7:00 a.m. was imposed for residents living within two miles of the crash site.

Norfolk Southern Railroad opened a family assistance center and provided money for food and shelter to residents who were forced to evacuate.

There were nine deaths including six workers from Avondale Mills, the train engineer, a truck driver and a local resident in his home. Autopsies performed the next day found all nine died from chlorine inhalation.

DHEC has begun epidemiological studies and a registry created for follow up of long-term health and psychosocial consequences. At least 324 people were evaluated at local hospitals in Aiken, Columbia, West Columbia, Barnwell, and in four hospitals in Augusta, GA. Lists of hospitalized patients and emergency department logs have been obtained for all of the facilities treating victims of the chlorine exposure. Plans are to interview as many people as possible that received medical treatment following their exposure. Workers on duty at the mills that did not seek medical care and a sample of residents from within a one-mile radius of the crash site will also be surveyed.

Throughout the event, public information and risk communications played a key role. Accurate information was essential during the "sheltering in place" phase and later when the evacuation order was given. Periodic news media briefings were held to keep the public informed of the events and activities. DHEC spokespersons participated in tracking the events, preparing materials for the news media and public and in the news briefings.

As Graniteville residents were allowed to return to their homes, DHEC staff were posted in the neighborhoods as community information liaisons to provide information and answer questions.

DHEC staff participated in the process of inspecting homes with suspected wiring damage due to the corrosion of the wiring by the chlorine vapors.

To help you understand the effects of news releases and summary statements issued to the media, the following are examples of press coverage that emerged from the Graniteville chlorine leak episode. Each benefited from background information included in the South Carolina DHEC press kit, displayed above.

#### Component 4: Published news

(Source: Environment News Service. View at <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/jan2005/2005-01-10-04.asp>)

## Chlorine Gas From South Carolina Train Crash Kills Nine

**AIKEN, South Carolina**, January 10, 2005 (ENS) - Nine men have died after a 42 car Norfolk Southern freight train slammed into a parked train on a side track in the small town of Graniteville, South Carolina early Thursday. Fourteen cars on the moving train derailed, including three chlorine tank cars, one of which leaked a cloud of deadly green gas.

Aiken County Coroner Tim Carlton said Saturday that eight of the deaths resulted from inhalation of chlorine gas from the leaking tank car. The exception is the engineer of the moving train, who died in the crash.

Six textile mill workers, along with the train engineer; a truck driver and a man who was found in his Main Street home, died of chlorine inhalation, Carlton said.



Officials are concerned about the whereabouts of several other workers who are still missing.

*Chlorine gas escaped from a tank car ruptured when a moving train slammed into a parked one in Graniteville, South Carolina. (Photo courtesy Aiken County Public Safety)*

Besides the nine fatalities, at least 234 people went to area hospitals, most with respiratory illness from inhaling chlorine gas. Of the 58 people admitted, 38 were still in hospital Saturday, five in critical condition.

Authorities ordered all 5,400 people within a mile of the railroad crash to evacuate in the afternoon because the chlorine was still leaking from the tank car, forming a choking, toxic plume. Officials say many residents will not be able to return to their homes before Wednesday at the earliest because more chlorine could still leak from the tank.

Crews have used plastic sheets to temporarily stop the leak, but the chlorine is expected to penetrate the plastic shortly. Sodium hydroxide was pumped into the damaged tank car to change the chlorine to a chemical similar to household bleach, that can be pumped into tanker trucks. Crews must also remove the chlorine from the other two tank cars - one is damaged, but not ruptured.

A two-mile no entry zone around the crash site imposed Thursday was changed to a one-mile radius Saturday night, but Hunt said the no entry zone will remain in place until at least Wednesday.

“There is a potential for another release,” Aiken County Sheriff Michael Hunt said at a press conference Saturday, after meeting with hazardous materials experts.

National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) spokeswoman Debbie Hersman said Saturday that chlorine concentrations at the site remained at "unsafe levels." Each of the three chlorine cars was fully loaded with about 90 tons of pressurized liquid chlorine, Hersman said.

Thom Berry, spokesman for the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control, said that as of Friday night, an estimated 60 to 70 tons had escaped from the leaking car, leaving it about one-third full.

South Carolina Governor Governor Mark Sanford and the Aiken County Council have declared states of emergency to provide maximum assistance with the aftermath of Thursday's train collision in Graniteville. Resources have been mobilized from many agencies within Aiken County, across South Carolina, and from Georgia to provide medical, decontamination, and security services. Cleanup is expected to take several days.

The U.S. Transportation Department and the Federal Railroad Administration sent nine experts to the scene to assist the National Transportation Safety Board in its investigation.

The team, which includes the department's top railroad hazardous materials expert, also will conduct a separate investigation into the circumstances surrounding the breach of the chlorine tank car to determine precisely how the derailment led to the release of chlorine gas.

"We are concerned about the nature of the incident and the tragic loss of life and are committed to a thorough review in order to ensure the safe operation of the railroad and the well-being of residents living in the Aiken community," said Robert Jamison, acting administrator of the Federal Railroad Administration.

The Chlorine Institute, a trade association, activated CHLOREP, its Chlorine Emergency Response Plan, and dispatched an emergency response team trained in handling chlorine to the accident site. The team is working with the NTSB and state and local officials. "The Chlorine Institute is offering assistance to the South Carolina Governor's office," said President Kathleen Shaver. "The Chlorine Institute wants to understand what caused this tragedy so it won't happen again."



***Aiken County Sheriff Michael Hunt***  
***(Photo courtesy Aiken County Sheriff's Department)***

Crews worked Sunday to plug the leak that sent green clouds of gas over the surrounding mill buildings and residential neighborhoods.

The FBI is investigating the position of a switch that controls access to the siding. It was in the wrong position when the moving train hit the stationary train that had been parked on the siding for more than seven hours.

The moving train was heading from Augusta, Georgia to Columbia, South Carolina. The crash site is just 20 minutes away from the Savannah River Site (SRS), a federal Department of Energy

(DOE) nuclear research and storage facility. Early Thursday morning, SRS sent a four man hazardous materials team to help with searches and evacuations, said DOE spokesman Bill Taylor.

Local Graniteville, Aiken and Augusta responders had benefited from training with the SRS crews. Aiken officials also took advantage of SRS computers, which calculated weather conditions to predict where the chlorine cloud might drift, Taylor said.

Shortly after the crash and evacuation, Norfolk Southern established a temporary emergency Local Assistance Center to handle payment of expenses and losses to people impacted by the accident.

"It is our intent through the settlement of claims involving incidental expenses, inconvenience, evacuation costs and substantiated property damage to ease the impact of the accident and evacuation on the community," the company said in a statement. Settlements of these claims "does not preclude submission of personal injury claims, claims for subsequently incurred incidental expenses, and unforeseen property damage claims in the future," the company stated.

All claims will be handled by the local Norfolk Southern claims office. Claims can be presented at the company's Local Assistance Center in Aiken while it remains open. Call 642-7119 or 800/230-7049.

Or contact Thomas Tate, Senior Claim Agent, Norfolk Southern Railway, 1770 Andrews Road, Columbia SC 29201, Phone: 803-733-3993; Fax: 803-733-3936.

This is the second deadly train crash in Graniteville in the past two months. In November, five mill employees were killed when their car was struck near the same location by another Norfolk Southern train.

**Component 5: Published news**

The following news story appeared online at CNN's website and can be found at:  
[www.cnn.com/2005/US/01/06/train.collusion/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2005/US/01/06/train.collusion/index.html)

## **Train collision releases chlorine gas**

### **Two killed, dozens injured in South Carolina accident**

Thursday, January 6, 2005 Posted: 7:18 PM EST (0018 GMT)

**GRANITEVILLE, South Carolina (CNN) -- Two people were killed and dozens injured when a freight train collided with a stopped train early Thursday near Graniteville, South Carolina. Potentially lethal chlorine gas leaked from some of the derailed cars, officials said.**

One of those killed was the engineer on one of the Norfolk Southern trains involved in the accident, said rail line spokeswoman Susan Terpay.

Authorities confirmed a second death, but did not say whether that person was on the train.

South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford declared a state of emergency for Aiken County.

A northbound Norfolk Southern freight train made up of two locomotives and 42 rail cars, three of which were carrying chlorine, apparently struck a locomotive and two rail cars that were stopped parallel to the main rail line, Terpay said. She said it was not clear how many cars had derailed.

Thom Berry, a spokesman for the state Department of Health and Environmental Control, told The Associated Press that two other hazardous materials, cresol and sodium hydroxide, were being carried on the train in liquid form.

Two decontamination sites were set up, and a team from the National Transportation Safety Board was on its way to the scene.

The collision occurred shortly before 2:40 a.m., said Aiken County sheriff's Lt. Michael Frank.

Several of the cars on one train overturned, felling a tree and trapping a woman inside her car, Frank said.

He did not know the extent of her injuries, but said she was freed by rescue personnel and taken to a hospital.

Area residents were taken to hospitals after complaining of breathing difficulty and eye irritation, Frank said. Two decontamination and shelter sites were set up, one at a high school and another at the University of South Carolina-Aiken.

About 70 people sought treatment at hospitals, Frank said, and about 20 were admitted, some of them in critical condition in the intensive care unit, he said. One person died at the hospital, Frank said.

Another 25 people were decontaminated at USC-Aiken and then taken to Medical College of Georgia, in Augusta, he said. A hospital spokeswoman said it had received a total of 27 patients in the aftermath of the accident.

Of the eight who were admitted, two were in critical condition, one was in serious condition, four in fair condition and one in good condition, a spokeswoman said.

Residents were told to stay inside, shut ventilation systems, close doors and windows and monitor news reports regarding the spill. "No one needs to be alarmed," Frank said. "They just need to be aware of the situation."

By all accounts, he said, residents were heeding those instructions.

Several schools were closed, and Avondale Mills shut its textile plants in Warrentonville and Graniteville for the remainder of the day.

Frank had no estimate of when the site might be cleared. "We'll be here for as long as it takes to bring this to a conclusion," he said.

*CNN's John Murgatroyd contributed to this story.*

## **Including a media invitation**

---

Another item you might consider including with the press kit--if applicable--is an invitation to the media to cover an event. However, this element is obviously not applicable in the case of a natural or human-made disaster or other inherently newsworthy event.

On the next page is a template for inviting the news media.

Template  
**Inviting Media to cover event**

Date

Name of Reporter, Editor  
Name of Newspaper, Radio or TV Station  
Street Address  
City, State, ZIP

Dear *(Title, Name)*,

I would like to invite you to *(location)* to cover *(the meeting/event)* as part of the *(event)*. *Add sentence or two about the event here.*

*Write paragraph about the goals here.*

I will be in touch with you to see whether you can cover our event, or you can reach me by phone at *(phone number)* or by email at *(email address)*. In the meantime, if you would like to learn more about *(organization)*, please visit the website at *(website address)*.

Sincerely,  
Your name  
Your organization

### **Press kit checklist**

---

These steps can help guide you through the process of putting a press kit together.

- ✓ Determine what media you would like to send the kit to.
- ✓ Along with the press kit, send a letter inviting a reporter to cover the story and the make follow-up calls (selectively) to reporters to determine their interest.
- ✓ Try to get your story included in appropriate press daybooks.
- ✓ Write a news release (See Module 1) to give to reporters the necessary information to help them write their story.
- ✓ Make copies of your news release to hand out to reporters as background information.
- ✓ Make copies of any other relevant handout materials, such as project documents or research materials.

### **Class activity 2.1 - Create a press kit**

Ask students to create a press kit for a public health topic they are working on. If they wish, instead of inventing a fictional health agency, they can use a one-page organizational background sheet from an existing organization.

### **After the press kit is disseminated**

---

#### **Give the press a call**

After you have sent a press packet, give each reporter or news director/editor a call. Rather than simply asking whether they received your press packet, use this opportunity to introduce yourself and your organization and indicate how you can be a resource to them. Let them know that they can contact you if they have any questions. You can also share with them any upcoming events that you might be having. However, keep the focus primarily on you and your organization as a resource in this relationship-building phase. Make sure to limit the call time since reporters are extremely busy people.

**Helpful tip:** In addition to sending specific journalists and editors the press kit consider posting your news release in the Associated Press daybook.

#### **What Is the Daybook?**

The daybook provides members of the media with a daily calendar of media events happening in and around a city or state. News services, like the Associated Press, maintain a daybook and distribute it through their wire services to journalists nationwide. In addition to a national daybook, AP publishes state and local versions. Newsroom managers, assignment editors and reporters from other media outlets check the daybook many times each day for the latest updates on important events happening throughout the region.

#### **A daybook listing looks similar to this:**

May 2, 2007

Public Meeting

Discussion: Public Health Consequences from Chlorine Gas

Participants: XXXXX, Director of Health Services

Location: Department of Health and Environmental Control

Contact: Jane Doe, 404-000-0000, XXXX@dhr.state.us

**How can you make certain that your media events get listed on the daybook?**

You must pitch your activity to the daybook editor in advance of the event in order to have it placed on the calendar of news events for a specific day. Getting the event on the daybook tells journalists in your community that an event is happening, lets them know who will be participating, and gives them a hint about the news that will be released. Pitching a daybook editor should not replace directly contacting other reporters or local print and broadcast media outlets about your event.

**How to pitch and place stories on the Associated Press daybook.**

Pitch events that include one or all of the following elements:

1. New and newsworthy information, such as the release of new data, the announcement of strong community involvement in one of your initiatives, or a news conference with local dignitaries.
2. Media-friendly activities that are visually appealing (e.g., a health fair or clean-up effort).
3. A schedule of your activities, including a list of spokespeople who are available to speak to reporters about your event or story idea.
4. Prepare a news advisory with the “who,” “what,” “when” and “where” of your event as well as any other information to be included in the daybook listing.
5. Consult the state-by-state listing of AP bureaus at [www.ap.org/pages/contact/contact.html](http://www.ap.org/pages/contact/contact.html)
6. Call the daybook editor, pitch your event, and fax or e-mail a copy of your news advisory to the bureau at least one week in advance of the event. While daybooks are updated on a regular basis, most reporters look at the Monday daybook to plan their week. Make sure the advisory is sent to the daybook by the Friday prior to the event.
7. Follow up with the daybook editor by phone or e-mail to find out if your event is listed. When you are contacting the daybook editor, you might say, “I’m just checking if my event is on the daybook.”
8. When you are contacting local reporters, refer to the daybook listing in your pitch. For example, you might say “You may have seen our event on the AP daybook. I’m calling to give you additional information about ...”
9. Update the daybook editor if there are changes in your event location or time or if prominent speakers join your efforts.

### **When to contact the media**



#### **Print**

It is best to call a newsroom between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m., when reporters are likely to be available and not on deadline.

#### **Television**

Planning editors generally take calls between 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m., but not around noontime when they are putting together their mid-day news show. It is best to call the assignment desk after the morning planning meeting, which usually ends between 9:30 and 10:00 a.m. Do not forget to describe the story's visuals when making your pitch.

#### **Radio**

The best time to call is early in the morning—between 7:30 and 8:30 a.m. After that, the staff goes into planning meetings. You can make another round of calls at about 10:00 a.m. News directors, reporters and producers are often gone by the afternoon. If you are pitching a specific press conference or event and the reporter is not able to attend, offer to have one of your staff do a taped interview.

#### **Online media**

Reporters who write for online publications often have revolving deadlines, but, as a general rule, you should follow the same rules that apply to print reporters. Call between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.