

# STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE

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## What To Do IMMEDIATELY When You're Contacted by the Media by SBC Staff

*Review the steps you should take right away if you are contacted by the media and prepare to answer questions with facts about the structural building components industry.*

As the structural building component industry continues to grow and gain market share and visibility, the potential for media exposure increases. In some cases, such as a Habitat for Humanity project or a piece on the industry's contributions to "green building," this exposure is a positive thing. But imagine this situation: A magazine, newspaper or television station reporter calls your company to interview you on a potentially negative situation, not about your company, but about the truss industry in general. What should you do?

### TAKE ACTION

- DO NOT speak on the topic at that time. Tell the reporter you would like some time to prepare for the interview.
- Immediately call your WTCA Chapter President, other chapter officers AND WTCA-National staff.
- Develop an action plan in concert with the Chapter president and WTCA staff.
- Determine who will be the spokesperson for the industry on this issue.
- Determine all the facts and then the key talking points—boil these down to three points at most.
- Determine who has the best working knowledge of the facts and talking points.
- Ensure that anyone who speaks on the issue should use the three talking points as the basis of any conversation. All members need to speak as if with one voice.
- Call the journalist or reporter to set up the interview date and time—preferably face to face at their location.
- Prepare for as many questions as you can. Gather important data.
- Answer all questions with a key talking point as the foundation, if possible. Consider a press release as an alternative.
- Stay focused on the issue and key talking points for the entire interview. Do not let your guard down or say anything in what seems like casual conversation. It might come back to haunt you later.
- Thank the interviewer when you are finished for the opportunity to provide your perspective.
- Compliment yourself and your colleagues on a job well done.

### KEEP YOUR GUARD UP

As you go through this process, take into account that the media's main goal is to generate viewers and ratings, along with the advertising sales dollars that go with it. One must always

remember that this intent does not necessarily foster objectivity and accurate use of ALL the facts. Given this, the interview questions will likely be geared to elicit the emotional side of the issue at hand.

Before going into an interview situation, bear in mind the following realities:

- You must know the subject matter far better than the journalist or reporter. They are very good at doing their homework, so if you do not know the topic inside and out, you cannot anticipate the answers to questions they are asking and formulate a response that takes the emotion out of the answer.
- Journalists and reporters will ask the same question over and over using different phrasing to see if they can strike a nerve or get a different response. Our answers must be consistent, accurate and stick to the fact-based industry message.
- At the end of the interview, the reporter or journalist may go into conversational mode. Remember that this is the time that something innocent can be said that could be taken out of context and used to interject emotion back into the situation. Never let your guard down during an interview, even if it appears to be over.

## HANG YOUR HAT ON THE FACTS

It isn't news to structural building component manufacturers that this is a quiet, hard-working industry with excellent facts behind its success, but that doesn't mean that the general public is aware of this. Education is key to reaching the marketplace and informing the media, our customers, specifiers, local legislators, etc. about the industry. Facts mean knowledge and knowledge means better decisions. ([WTCA](#) has developed a number of educational tools for reaching your market.)

We need to be proactive, not reactive. It's easy to think that it is someone else's responsibility to educate the world about this industry. However, lack of involvement may make us our own worst enemy. Ask yourself, what should I be doing for our industry? In the long run, not taking the initiative to provide education in your area may mean that the media or someone else in your community is the one who paints the picture of the component industry.

What are some ways to get the word out and put a human face on the component industry? Write press releases. Take pictures. Make donations to civic building projects. Conduct plant tours for building officials, architects, engineers, firefighters and for legislators and potential legislators during an election year cycle. Hold "get out the vote" events to promote voting in your area. Show your local community how much value your company adds to your community. This is very important preventative medicine for our industry. Left undone, our industry is at far greater risk than any of us can imagine. Make active, local involvement in putting a human face on the truss industry a part of your job description. If there is not a commitment to it being a key part of your job, it will never get done.

Our industry's story needs to be told in our own voices, not by someone who will put his or her emotional spin on it. We must be energized to undertake this activity or it is clear that, as our industry gets bigger, we will be a target for criticism even when it's completely undeserved.

Consider getting involved in education at a grass roots level—a little time spent now could offset an insurmountable problem later.

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This information is based on an article from the [April 2000](#) issue of SBC Magazine (then WOODWORDS) and is available in brochure form from WTCA. Call 608/274-4849 ext. 8 to request your copy.

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