

## Protecting Yourself From Media Intrusion

### Best Practice Paper

This best practice paper is one of a series for clients from **PIELLE Consulting**. It gives you advice and information about protecting individuals in the face of potential media intrusion. For further advice on this or any of our services in professional communication, please contact Carol Friend or Peter L Walker.

**PIELLE Consulting Group** is an international communication management practice that was established in 1980.

We provide strategic and tactical advice and services in the full spectrum of professional communication management:

Community Relations  
Corporate Communication  
Corporate Responsibility  
Crisis Communication  
EU and International Affairs  
Government Relations  
Internal Communication  
Issue Management  
Media Relations  
Public Relations  
Public Affairs  
Stakeholder Engagement  
Skills Coaching

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### The Risk is Always Present

When a controversial story breaks, every journalist will be rushing to meet a deadline. Everyone will be battling to get a picture, a quote or a snippet of information that others do not have. None will wait for you to prepare response statements. They will start preparing their story immediately.

Current self-regulation of the media requires that the privacy of each individual is respected. The primary defence of the media against this position is 'public interest' - an ill-defined concept that is open to broad interpretation.

For organisations and individuals, best practice is to say SOMETHING—even if what you say, actually says NOTHING!

There may also be times when a journalist, broadcaster, a film or stills photographer will pursue an individual in search of information or a picture.

### First Line of Defence

If you are caught unawares by media on the telephone or face-to-face, it is best to avoid the natural reaction response of "no comment".

The reason is simple – whatever the question, "no comment" tends to suggest to the reader or viewer, when it is in print or broadcast, that you have no defence to the question or accusation.

Instead, use alternatives such as:

- I am sorry, but I have no information for you at this time
- Please let me know on this telephone number (not home) what questions you have and I will ensure you have a response.

From time to time, you, your family or one of your staff may be one of the pursued.

Whatever the reason for you being a target in this way, it is always best to

- Organise a phone number for all enquiries (PIELLE will do this for you if you alert us)
- Be prepared for the persistent and intrusive attention of media at a personal level.

Keep this best practice paper readily available and use it as a checklist and guidance for protecting your personal interests.

And, if you need advice or help, call or email us at PIELLE – we are always here for you. Our office phone line will give you out of hours numbers for 24-hour assistance, 365 days a year.

### Transport and Your Car

Media who are keen to obtain a picture or statement will work hard to find their target.

Asking somebody locally, whether yours is the car across the street can generate information on the make, colour or location of your vehicle. The enquiry and response may appear innocent, but it will breach your personal security. So:

- Avoid using your own vehicle – particularly if it is distinctive or has a personalised number plate
- Change your regular journey routes and times
- Try to avoid travelling alone

If you suspect you are being followed, drive to a police station and ask for help.

PIELLE Consulting Group

*A strategic consultancy of senior professionals working in partnership with clients since 1980.*

At PIELLE, one of our core professional services is risk and issue communication management.

We help to identify risks and issues to your organisation, ensuring robust systems and procedures in preparedness for risks to your reputation and your operations.

Should an emergency or a crisis occur, we are available 24/7 to support clients through communication, handling media enquiries for you and taking an active role in your major incident team.

**PIELLE Consulting Group businesses:**

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## Personal Security—Telephone

Screen all phone calls at home by using an answering machine.

Leave your mobile phone on answer too, to allow call screening.

Make full use of caller ID technology

- dial 1471 on a BT line to check who last called you
- dial 141 before you make a call to stop your BT line from identifying the number from which you are dialling

At work, always ensure that a colleague answers calls and checks the caller's identity to allow you to decide whether to speak to them.

For media calls, arrange for this information to be noted for later use

- Name
- Publication or broadcast station
- Contact phone number(s)
- Deadline to which they are working

Radio and television have immediate deadlines, 24 hours a day. Print media may also have earlier deadlines than you might expect, including for their website editions.

An information vacuum can lead to speculation or misinformation. It is important to arrange response to these calls.

## Personal Security at Home

If media are pursuing you, while you are at home:

- Keep away from windows and draw curtains or blinds
- Stay inside
- Do not answer the door unless you know who is there
- Call the police if you feel under siege or threatened
- Advise immediate neighbours so they don't become part of a curious crowd

You may wish to stay with friends, family or in a hotel in the very short term to avoid media attention.

Certainly, it may be sensible to arrange for your partner to stay away from home with any children if media are likely to arrive on your doorstep.

If you do stay at home, try to vary your arrival and departure times, your travel times and routes – make your routines less predictable.

## Personal Security at Work

Ensure that reception and security at work are alerted to potential media visitors – they may not declare they are journalists.

If the issue of media interest is related to your work, make sure that

- site security is strengthened
- your professional public relations and media relations team are fully briefed
- staff are appropriately briefed to avoid speculation
- local police contacts are alerted as appropriate

- telephone and personal callers are properly recorded and vetted

If you decide, following professional advice, to allow media onto your site for any reason, ensure

- They are not left free to talk to staff or other visitors
- They are always accompanied
- Photographers and film crew are notified that no people and no vehicle registration numbers are recorded without specific consent, in the interests of individuals' privacy.