Interacting with the public

(Based on chapter 2 of the Local Roads Maintenance Workers’ Manual, TR-514)

Interacting with the public may be the most important part of your work day. You are the public face of your organization.

Good responses

Be sure to respectfully acknowledge all comments or questions from citizens. If you can address a person’s question yourself, do so. If a question is outside your area of responsibility, refer the person to your supervisor.

Following are some effective responses to questions or requests for information:

- That’s a good question. I don’t know the answer, but let me refer you to someone who does.
- [After responding to a question for which you are responsible.] That’s a good question. Have I answered your concern?
- Thanks for your interest.
- If a question is outside your area of responsibility, refer the person to your supervisor.
- Be sure to respectfully acknowledge all comments or questions from citizens.
- Do not take questions or complaints personally. You are a symbol of the organization, much like the referee in a sporting event, and comments are not about you personally.
- Document all questions or comments from the public and report them to your supervisor.

Useful communication tools

In some agencies, maintenance workers carry cards with contact information (name, phone and fax numbers, e-mail, etc.) for various services. See figure 1. When citizens have questions, workers can use the card to refer them to appropriate staff or offices.

Another useful communication tool is a “door knocker”: a flyer to hang on house doorknobs. See figure 2. These can be especially useful for answering questions/providing information in advance of specific road maintenance activities.

Key points

- Always be honest, courteous, and respectful.
- Know your agency’s position on work rules and maintenance policies and procedures.
- If you don’t know an answer, say so. Refer the questioner to your supervisor or other appropriate person.
- When you’re asked a question, share only the facts. Don’t represent your opinion as your agency’s position or policy.
- Do not share your personal opinion.
- Do not argue. A good question to ask yourself is, “Do I want this conversation on the front page of the newspaper?”
- Be loyal to your agency. If you disagree with a policy or position, take it up with your supervisor, not with someone outside the organization.
- Have information for appropriate contacts readily available.
- Don’t take questions or complaints personally. You are a symbol of the organization, much like the referee in a sporting event, and comments are not about you personally.
- Document all questions or comments from the public and report them to your supervisor.

Figure 1. Sample information card

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CENTER COUNTY, Iowa 123 Main St., Centertown, IA 50000-0001 515-222-2219; fax 515-222-2200 (<a href="http://www.centercounty.com">www.centercounty.com</a>)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joe Brown, Engineer 319-222-2220 <a href="mailto:joe.brown@centercounty.com">joe.brown@centercounty.com</a> Board of Supervisors 319-222-2224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Black, Roads Supervisor 319-222-2221 <a href="mailto:mike.black@centercounty.com">mike.black@centercounty.com</a> Assessor’s Office 319-222-2223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permits and Policies 319-222-2222 Conservation Office 319-222-2226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and Zoning 319-222-2223 Utilities 319-222-2227</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

M-F 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.