



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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# Actuarial Circles program seeks to link actuaries and reporters

by Linda Heacox  
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Since its kickoff session last March, Actuarial Circles attracted such interest that two more meetings had to be added. With a goal to establish or improve relations between individual actuaries and their local media, the program offers basic media relations guidelines, SOA staff support, and help in contacting the media.

The first meeting in Chicago last March attracted 39 actuaries. The next session in Toronto was attended by 32. More than 200 other members asked about upcoming sessions, so the SOA added a Circles briefing at the Boston Annual Meeting on October 18.

When President Bob Berin took office last October, he introduced the concept to SOA members in his incoming presidential address. As he explained, this grassroots effort demonstrates how actuaries can lend their expertise to financial issues being discussed in the media. While not a full-scale media training program, each session gives guidelines on how to approach and work with the media. The local Actuarial Circles creates a loose organization that helps actuaries respond to the issues and generate media interest on their own. The SOA program gives actuaries some tools and tips on how to become sources for their local press, TV, and radio.

Participants make media contacts on issues about which they are knowledgeable. Those issues do not have to be strictly actuarial. One Canadian actuary reported that he had been a source in a local story regarding investment opportunities in Southeast Asia. Two other Circles members have been sources of insurance information for stories on state health care reform. Many others focus on writing letters to the editor on subjects ranging from

Social Security, to Medicare, to local tax issues.

SOA Communications staff supports the program in several ways. Regular updates called "Circles Alerts" let members know what their colleagues are doing media-wise. Staff also sent local business editors Circles members' names and phone numbers to use as sources on stories. Sometimes staff members call Circles' members, asking them to speak to the media on specific information requests involving the member's area of expertise.

Circle members benefit personally by gaining new communications skills, and the profession benefits by having knowledgeable actuaries stepping forward to make sure the profession is being heard. If you are interested in finding out more about Actuarial Circles or in attending future sessions, please call Cecilia Green (e-mail: 76041.2773@compuserve.com) or Linda Heacox (e-mail: 102234.2544@compuserve.com) at the SOA (phone: 708/706-3500).



Linda Heacox (left), SOA PR specialist, responds to Tom Edwalds' (center, below) question about dealing with the media during the March 14 Actuarial Circles briefing in Chicago. Ken Krebbiel, American Academy of Actuaries associate director of communications (center, left photo), and Linda Delgadillo, SOA director of communications, (right, left photo) also participated.

