

BACKGROUND

May 2010

Ministry of Forests and Range
Provincial Wildfire Coordination Centre

MEDIA SAFETY AT THE SCENE OF A WILDFIRE

- The media plays a key role in communicating information about wildfires to the general public, helping to keep people and communities safe. The Wildfire Management Branch endeavours to provide the media with timely and safe access to wildfire sites.
- Under the Workers' Compensation Act, the Wildfire Management Branch is responsible for the safety of all individuals who attend a wildfire site. Members of the media are responsible for following all health and safety regulations as prescribed by the Wildfire Management Branch.
- To gain access to a wildfire site, media must contact either the Provincial Fire Information Officer or the local Fire Centre Information Officer prior to arriving on scene.
- Fire details, safety restrictions and site access protocols will be given to visiting media, either in-person or over the telephone, and will be supplemented by on-site safety briefings by Wildfire Management Branch staff.
- One person from each visiting media outlet must be designated to brief their respective reporters and camera operators on required safety regulations and ensure these regulations are being followed.
- Reporters and camera operators are responsible for wearing appropriate footwear and clothing to protect their arms and legs. Tightly woven clothes made from natural fibres and suitable footwear for rough terrain are advisable. Ministry of Forests and Range staff will provide hard hats and other safety equipment as necessary.
- If media fail to comply with the rules set by the Wildfire Management Branch, they will be instructed to leave by the on-site incident commander. Repeat safety violators may be reported to WorkSafeBC or Labour Canada.
- Always be aware of Restricted Area Orders within the vicinity of a fire. These orders are often put into place to limit the risk of a fire, address public safety concerns, and avoid interference with fire control operations. Failure to comply with these Orders could result in a \$10,000 fine.

Aircraft Access to Wildfire Sites

- It is illegal to fly aircraft over a wildfire site. A media aircraft flying within five nautical miles of a wildfire site, must be more than 3,000 feet above ground level.
- For aircraft to gain access to a wildfire site, media must contact either the Provincial Fire Information Officer or the local Fire Centre Information Officer. The request will be

forwarded to the Regional Wildfire Coordination Officer and access granted if conditions are appropriate and safe.

- Media must also check for a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) regarding any additional restrictions.

Additional Information

- Know your escape routes. Ask if you're unsure.
- Watch for rolling logs and rocks dislodged by suppression activity.
- Stay away from windfalls, weakened trees, loose rocks and hot spots.
- Only ride in pedestrian vehicles (not bulldozers or skidders) and always wear a seatbelt.
- Use caution around machinery and only approach when in full view of the operator.
- Stay at least two tree-lengths from tree falling activities.
- When boarding or exiting a helicopter, follow a pilot's instructions carefully.
- Stay clear of airtanker drop areas and helicopter landing areas.
- Have plenty of water on hand to prevent dehydration.
- ALL injuries MUST be reported to the Incident Commander, and treated by the nearest on-site first aid attendant.

-30-

Contact: Kim Steinbart
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More information on wildfires in British Columbia is available on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/BCGovFireInfo> and Facebook at <http://facebook.com/BCForestFireInfo>

For more information on government services or to subscribe to the Province's news feeds using RSS, visit the Province's website at www.gov.bc.ca.