

Dealing with the Media

The ACT Rural Fire Service Chief Officer has issued this standard operating procedure under Section 38(1) of the *Emergency Act 2004* – A Chief Officer may determine standards and protocols.

Purpose

This standard operating procedure (SOP) is to inform members of the ACT Rural Fire Service (ACT RFS), both volunteer and staff, of their responsibilities when dealing with the media and advice about how they can help the media to provide comprehensive and accurate information.

Scope

This SOP is applicable to all personnel from the ACT Rural Fire Service brigades, as defined in the *Emergencies Act 2004*.

Background

It is important that the media are provided with the opportunity to report on emergency events as they happen. The media are often an important source of information to the public and provide information about a current and projected emergency and advice to the community. At times, the media will also want to know about non-operational matters such as issues or projects being managed by the service.

The ESA's Public Information and Engagement Team have responsibility for handling all information requests from the media and managing the release of information to the media.

Responsibilities

Members (including volunteer and staff members)	Refer requests by media to ACT RFS Duty Officer (DO). Follow protocol in this SOP when being interviewed.
ACT RFS Duty Officer (DO)	Refer requests by media to ESA Public Information & Engagement Team.
ESA Public Information and Engagement Team / Media Liaison Officer	Provide information to media, arrange briefings and interviews and access to the fireground and other areas controlled by ESA when authorised by the Incident Controller.
Incident Controller (IC)	Holds responsibility for media on fireground and related areas.

Standard operating procedure

Handling requests for information or interviews

All requests by the media for information or interviews with ACT RFS members, or access to a fireground or ESA controlled space should be directed in the first instance to the ESA Public Information and Engagement Team through the RFS DO.

ACTRFS members are not to approach media outlets to provide comment or seek interviews under any circumstances for any activities, operational or non-operational.

During major operations or incidents, when an Incident Management Team (IMT) is formed, a Media Liaison Officer is appointed as part of the IMT to manage all media activities. The Media Liaison Officer will organise briefing times and locations for the media and will organise the appropriate people to speak with the media. In these cases, the Media Liaison Officer reports directly to the Incident Controller.

Under no circumstances will media requests or requirement be permitted to interfere with fireground safety or operational effectiveness.

Handling interviews

All ACT RFS personnel, staff and volunteers, have a responsibility to help build a trusted relationship with the community by effectively engaging with the media as described in this SOP.

When speaking on behalf of the ACT RFS, ACT RFS members need to comply with the following protocols that are defined by the Code of Conduct and Ethics of RFS Members. RFS members:

- must never publicly criticise the policies, decisions or activities of other organisations, ACT Government or the Service
- must not share personal or confidential information
- must provide the Agency overview and not personal opinion – if members are approved to communicate with the media, talking points may be provided.

Note: Issue management through the media is not an effective way to influence organisational change. To manage issues, members should use internal consultative forums.

Media on the incident ground

On some occasions, media are permitted to enter a fireground and other ESA-controlled spaces. This must always be approved through the ESA Public Information and Engagement Team through the Incident Controller. The Incident Controller is responsible for all people at the incident site; including members of the media.

Before being allowed to enter a fireground, media must have appropriate training and certification and display an ESA approved identification card to confirm that they have successfully completed the training.

Follow the chain of command if safety is compromised.

All media must wear correct and full personal protective clothing/equipment before being allowed to work under direction on the fireground. All items are to be worn correctly. Media must leave a fireground when directed by the Incident Controller.

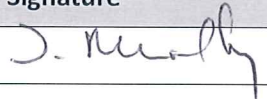
Interstate operations

When operating interstate, only members of the host state are permitted to make public comment, therefore all approaches by the media must be referred to the host state Media Liaison Officer.

Version history

Author	Version	Version Approval Date	Summary of Changes
Andrew Stark	1.0	15/02/2011	1 st Version
Carmel Summers	2.0	01/04/2020	Reviewed, updated and reformatted

Approved by

Name	Title/Role	Signature	Date
Joe Murphy	CO ACT RFS		02-04-2020

Document Owner

Position	Section
Manager	Operations

Next review due: 01/04/2022

Related documents

Document name
3.1.1 Code of Conduct and Ethics of RFS Members Service Standard
ACT JACS Media Enquiries (Direct and Indirect) Policy

Signed documents will be scanned and filed in TRIM.

