



## Interagency Media Guidelines for Wildland Fires March 19, 2004

### General Policy

- It is the policy of federal and state agencies to provide news media access to incidents including wildland fires, prescribed fires and wildland fire-use fires.
- Federal and state agencies are required to provide equitable and maximum news media access to wildland fire incidents.
- For the purposes of these guidelines, news media representatives include print and broadcast reporters; freelance print reporters; freelance videographers; and photographers.
- While the wildland firefighting agencies seek to provide safe access to incidents for news media representatives, the ultimate responsibility for their safety lies with the individual reporter and their employer.

### Guidelines

#### *Access*

- Visits to the fireline must receive the approval of the incident commander or designated representative.
- News media representatives will be escorted by a person qualified as a single resource boss or other appropriate escort approved by the incident commander. The incident commander may delegate escort approval authority to other incident personnel, such as the lead Information Officer or appropriate local authority.

#### *Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)*

- News media representatives will be required to wear PPE as outlined in the Fireline Handbook and the Interagency Standards for Fire and Aviation Operations (the “Red Book”) when working on or near the fireline, and have an appropriate safety briefing. PPE must meet National Fire Protection Association/National Wildfire Coordinating Group standards. The required PPE is:
  - 8-inch high, lace-type work boots with non-slip, melt-resistant soles and heels.
  - Aramid shirts
  - Aramid trousers
  - Hard hat with chinstrap
  - Leather gloves

- Fire shelter
- Water canteen

PPE may be provided by the fire organization if media representatives are unprepared.

### *Firefighter Training*

- News media representatives are invited to join in basic firefighter courses with federal and state providers, if there is sufficient room for them.
- These courses are voluntary. News media should be informed that attending them is not a guarantee of access, nor an endorsement of safety accreditation, but rather is an opportunity for information and education. Reporters can also be referred to authorized contract trainers or the academic community for basic firefighter courses.
- NWCG member agencies will not administer the work-capacity test to news media representatives because of liability concerns.

### *“Shadowing” Fire Crews*

- Personnel assigned to an incident will facilitate in-depth coverage opportunities for journalists. News media representatives requesting to “shadow” crews for more than one operational period on the fireline or in the fire area must:
  - Wear personal protective equipment and understand how to use it in accordance with the direction in the fireline handbook.
  - Coordinate activities with the lead Information Officer, who will communicate with the affected crew boss, incident commander, and the fire management officer at the crew’s home unit.
- It is strongly recommended that reporters requesting to shadow crews complete basic firefighter training including S-130 and S-190. If these courses have been taken in a previous year, a current refresher course is recommended. News media representatives must be able to affirm that they can walk in mountainous terrain, are in good physical condition, and have no known physical limitations.

### *Red Cards in the Incident Command System*

- News media representatives will not be issued Qualification Cards or “red cards” under the Incident Command System. The red-card system was designed for incident personnel with specific duties for which they are trained and qualified, and not for personnel not officially assigned to the incident.

### *Existing Laws and Policies*

- These guidelines apply to all wildland fires, prescribed fires, and wildland fire-use fires under federal or state jurisdiction, but are not intended to supersede existing tribal laws; state laws, such as media access laws in California; or chain-of-command procedures applicable to military crews.

### *Denial of Access*

- Denial of access to fire camp, the fireline or other related areas will be a rare occurrence. News media access may be limited when the Incident Commander determines:
  - Safety of firefighters or others may be compromised. Considerations should be the same as those for determining that conditions are unsafe for fire crews to be on the fireline including extreme fire behavior, expected change in the weather.
  - The presence of non-fire personnel compromises incident operations.
  - The presence of non-fire personnel compromises the integrity of an investigation.
  - A violation of security or privacy of incident personnel would occur.
- Federal and state agencies will support decisions regarding access by other jurisdictions, such as a private landowner, tribal entity, or local law enforcement agency, such as when the local law enforcement agency closes an area for/during evacuation purposes.
- Reasons for denial of access should be documented by the lead information officer and become part of the unit log.
- News media aviation resources must determine and abide by airspace restrictions that may be implemented by the FAA at the request of fire managers.

Contact: Rose Davis, Forest Service Public Affairs for Fire and Aviation Management; 208 387-5437, or Don Smurthwaite, BLM External Affairs for the Office of Fire and Aviation; 208 387-5895.

## California Media Access Guidelines

In California, State Law (see enclosure) allows credentialed news media access to fires, floods, earthquakes, explosions, accidents, etc. unless their activities prevent law enforcement and other emergency officials from doing their job. To ensure consistent application of the law during emergency situations the following guidelines apply:

- Credentialed news media representatives will not be denied access to National Forest System Lands unless by their presence they are compromising the safety of our employees, impeding the response of emergency equipment or personnel, or impeding the investigation of the incident.
- News media representatives are required to present proper press credentials to agency officials prior to accessing areas closed to the general public.
- It is strongly recommended that incident personnel provide qualified media escorts. However, in certain situations this may not be possible and credentialed news media should not be denied access if they do not have an escort, unless their presence results in compromising firefighter safety.
- While it is not required for access, it is strongly recommended that all news media have and wear personal protective equipment (PPE), and be given a safety briefing.
- Media who are using fixed or rotary aircraft must follow FAA regulations for closures or restrictions of airspace over incidents.

## **REPRINTED FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA PENAL CODE:**

### **CLOSING OF AREAS IN EMERGENCIES**

409.5(a) Whenever a menace to the public health or safety is created by a calamity such as flood, storm, fire, earthquake, explosion, accident or other disaster, officers of the California Highway Patrol, police departments or sheriff's office may close the area where the menace exists for the duration thereof by means of ropes, markers or guards to any and all persons not authorized by such officer to enter or remain within the closed area. If such a calamity creates an immediate menace to the public health, the local health officer may close the area where the menace exists pursuant to the conditions which are set forth above in this section.

(b) Officers of the California Highway Patrol, police departments or sheriff's office may close the immediate area surrounding any emergency field command post or any other command post activated for the purpose of abating any calamity enumerated in this section or any riot or other civil disturbance to any and all unauthorized persons pursuant to the conditions which are set forth in this section whether or not such field command post is located near to the actual calamitous riot or other civil disturbance.

(c) Any unauthorized person who willfully and knowingly enters an area closed pursuant to subdivision (a) or (b) and who willfully remains within such area after receiving notice to evacuate or leave shall be guilty of a misdemeanor.

(d) **NOTHING IN THIS SECTION SHALL PREVENT A DULY AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE OF ANY NEWS SERVICE, NEWSPAPER, OR RADIO OR TELEVISION STATION OR NETWORK FROM ENTERING THE AREAS CLOSED PURSUANT TO THIS SECTION.**