

MILES CITY INTERAGENCY DISPATCH CENTER MEDIA GUIDE

General Policy

It is the policy of federal and state agencies to provide news media access to incidents which include wildland fires, prescribed fires and wildland fire-use fires. Miles City Interagency Dispatch Center (MCC) will follow the guidelines set out in the National Interagency Media Guidelines for Wildland Fires.

This document contains specifics to the Eastern Montana Fire Zone.

Guidelines

During the fire season initial attack fire activity will be reported through WildWeb. When a large incident occurs and a team is in place, a Fire Information Officer assigned to the team will take over the responsibilities of keeping the media and public informed.

Access to Incident

To visit an incident, call MCC or the incident contacts to arrange with the incident Information Officer access and escort to the incident. With advance notice, the Information Officer can set up interviews and determine the best areas for photos. While visiting an incident, your escort will be with you at all times.

News media aviation resources must determine and abide by airspace restrictions that may be implemented by the FAA at the request of fire managers.

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 that safety will be compromised; presence may compromise incident operations, compromise the integrity of an investigation, or a violation of security or privacy.

Federal and state agencies will support decisions regarding access by other jurisdictions, such as a private landowner, tribal entity, or local law enforcement agency, or when the local law enforcement agency closes an area for/during evacuation purposes.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

News media will be required to wear PPE as outlined in the Fireline Handbook and Interagency Standards for Fire and Aviation Operations (the “Red Book”) when working within the fire perimeter and have an appropriate safety briefing. PPE may be provided by MCC or the incident if media representatives are unprepared.

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National Interagency Media Guidelines for Wildland Fires

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 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 within the fire perimeter, 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. 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

- Incident personnel 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.
 - 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 walk in mountainous terrain, be in good physical condition, with no known limitations.

Red Cards in the Incident Command System

- News media representatives will not be issued “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 non-incident personnel.

Existing Laws and Policies

- These guidelines apply to all 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 relevant to military crews.

Denial of Access

- Denial of access 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 much the same as those when it is deemed unsafe for fire crews to be on the fireline such as extreme fire behavior, expected change in the weather, and so forth.
 - 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.
- 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.