

Environment Canada's Media Relations Policy

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to all employees of Environment Canada on how they should deal with media inquiries and all other aspects of media relations.

Introduction

The Communications Branch of Environment Canada is responsible for ensuring that the public receives relevant and timely information about government policies, programs, services and initiatives relating to the Environment. The Media Relations section in the Communications Branch helps to support this overall objective.

The *Communications Policy of the Government of Canada*, adopted in 2002, designates the Minister of the Environment as the principal spokesperson for the department. The Minister is supported by the Ministerial Communications Services Division of the Communications Branch, which includes Media Relations. Media Relations is responsible for, amongst other things, responding to media requests, providing strategic advice, designating and coordinating subject matter experts' participation in interviews when required, as well as preparing for and conducting interviews with the media on behalf of Environment Canada. The goal is to ensure media requests are handled in a timely, professional and consistent manner.

In order to facilitate this, all media calls must be referred to Media Relations.

Operating Principles

Principal Spokesperson

As per the *Communications Policy of the Government of Canada*, the Minister of the Environment is the government's principal advocate and spokesperson on environmental matters both within Cabinet and externally.

As the government's principal spokesperson for Environment Canada, the Minister is responsible for informing the public about Environment Canada priorities, policies, programs and initiatives.

Primary Media Contacts

Media Relations Officers at Headquarters and in the regions are primary points of contact for media inquiries.

As primary media contacts, Media Relations Officers should:

- be as prompt and responsive as possible, within the limits of the law, when dealing with media enquiries, while recognizing that journalists often face tight deadlines and;
- build, nurture and maintain open and positive relations with the media.

If the Media Contact You Directly

All staff, including subject matter experts, should refer all media calls to Headquarters Media Relations at (819) 934-8008 or media@ec.gc.ca. Please alert Media Relations of the nature of the call so that they are able to follow-up on the request.

We ask that you do not speak to the reporter until given the go-ahead from a Media Relations Officer, in order to ensure the call is properly coordinated.

Depending on the nature of the call:

- A Media Relations Officer may return the call on behalf of the department
- If the reporter is seeking specific information that requires a subject matter expert, then the subject matter expert, relevant Communication Advisor and the Media Relations Officer may work together to return the call; or
- The call may be referred to the Minister's Office.

Staff should notify their immediate supervisor or communications advisor that a media request was received and that it has been referred to Media Relations.

If scientists, experts and/or enforcement officers attend conferences or court proceedings where media is expected to contact them directly, they are asked to contact their Communications Advisor as well as Media Relations prior to the event to determine if there are potential issues. Once that determination has been made, scientists, experts and/or enforcement officers in this situation may speak to the media without seeking approval for each specific request. They must speak only to the science or technical aspect of the issue at hand. Afterwards, a Media Interview Report Form will need to be submitted by the speaker to Media Relations.

Environment Canada Employees and Subject Matter Experts

Environment Canada employees and subject matter experts are sometimes called upon to speak directly with the media following consultation with Media Relations in Headquarters.

When speaking for the department, Environment Canada employees and subject matter experts:

- shall discuss only their own job within their personal areas of experience or expertise;
- shall respect the judicial process with respect to matters before the courts, and federal laws and policies such as the *Privacy Act* governing disclosure of information to the public; and
- shall have received accredited media training prior to dealing with media.

In addition, Environment Canada employees speaking in their official capacity, including designated subject matter experts and Media Relations Officers, shall not:

- respond to media queries that fall outside of their personal area of experience or expertise, unless authorized to do so;
- provide comments that could undermine the integrity of an investigation currently in progress;
- speculate about events, incidents, issues, or future policy decisions;
- offer personal opinion on government, Environment Canada policy; or
- discuss advice given to the Minister, Cabinet or their superiors.

Role of Media Relations Section

The media operate in a 24-hour news environment and deadlines are often very short, which makes it imperative that Environment Canada handle media requests promptly to accommodate publication and/or broadcast deadlines.

Media Relations operates at Headquarters from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. ET Monday to Friday.

Departmental Spokesperson

Media Relations Officers support the Minister and the department by serving as departmental spokespersons and responding directly to media inquires as appropriate.

While the Minister of the Environment is the principal spokesperson for the department, Media Relations Officers often serve as the “first line of contact” for the media into the department, and often speak for the department.

In certain cases, the response requires expert comment, or the Minister’s Office wishes to respond directly, in which case Media Relations Officers act in a liaison role (see below).

Media Liaison

Media Relations Officers liaise with the Minister’s Office and officials within the department, including Communications Advisors, to ensure that media requests, particularly those for interviews or technical information on specialized subjects, are responded to accurately and in a timely fashion by the appropriate spokesperson, including the Minister.

Media Coaching/Support

Media Relations also provides services including:

- support and assistance to designated spokespeople during media interviews to ensure officials are not misquoted;
- media coaching and advice on messaging so that subject experts are consistent and factual during interviews;
- strategic advice and media support to public events;
- logistical support for Environment Canada media opportunities, including one-on-one interviews, news conferences, technical briefings, teleconferences, scrums and others, as required; and
- negotiating corrections or retractions of inaccurate reporting as required;

Media Relations maintains a list of all approved departmental spokespeople, updated on a regular basis, and ensures that those on the list have received appropriate media training. Outcome Project Group Board leads are required to submit this list on a regular basis and assume the costs associated with the training.

Regional offices provide certain services and training in consultation with Headquarters in order to ensure consistency.

Reporting

To ensure that all outstanding calls have been returned, designated spokespersons or subject matter experts must submit a Media Interview Report Form to Media Relations after returning a media call.

Media lines are drafted in anticipation of media calls on a certain issue or as a reaction to certain issues. Media Relations works with Communications Advisors, both in the National Capital Region and in regions, who have the lead along with program in drafting the lines.

Official languages

Media Relations is conducted within the *Official Languages Policy Framework*, the *Official Languages Act* and the *Official Languages (Communications with and Services to the Public) Regulations*.

Weather information and Media Calls

On a daily basis, up to 50 percent of media calls to Environment Canada are media inquiries for up-to-date weather information, weather archival information, or requests to speak to someone about a weather event. There are also frequent requests received to speak to experts on atmospheric science, ice science or hurricane prediction.

To meet this important need, Environment Canada has in place a 24/7 toll-free National Severe Weather Media Access Line: 1-866-672-5463. Callers to this number can obtain recorded information and also speak directly with a Weather Preparedness Meteorologists (WPMs) across Canada

Environment Canada also provides a media weather information website service for media, free of charge: http://www.media.weatheroffice.gc.ca/index_e.html

For interviews or customized weather information regarding routine weather, Environment Canada has a fee-based telephone service: 1-900-565-5555.

Regional Communications Network

Regional Communicators play a key role in linking Media Relations with media outlets, stakeholders and others.

Regional Communicators may be designated by the Director of Ministerial and Executive Services to speak on behalf of the department or facilitate interviews with local media on issues of importance to Environment Canada.

Regional Communicators also help to ensure that Media Relations is aware of regional events or issues that may provide Environment Canada with opportunities to engage the public, educators or other stakeholders in a dialogue on issues of importance to the Department and the Government of Canada.

News Conferences and Technical Briefings

News Conferences

Media Relations works with the Minister's Office to coordinate times and booking the venue (National Press Theatre, 130-S Centre Block, or other locations) for news conferences in the National Capital Region and ensures that a media advisory has been drafted and approved for distribution to media outlets.

In accordance with the *Communications Policy of the Government of Canada*, the Minister of the Environment is the principal spokesperson for the department and, as such, is the central figure in a news conference. Key subject matter experts attend but do not usually participate in the news conference itself. Along with Media Relations staff, they provide strategic advice as required and address issues that may require follow-up by the department.

For events held at the National Press Theatre, a journalist member of the Parliamentary Press Gallery moderates all news conferences held on the premises. Media Relations works with the Chief of the Parliamentary Press Gallery to make the necessary arrangements for the news conferences and to ensure the availability of a journalist to moderate. Media Relations also

works with the Media Monitoring and Analysis unit to ensure that media coverage of events are tracked and analyses performed when needed.

When such events take place outside the National Capital Region, the appropriate Regional office, with support from the National Capital Region, coordinates the logistics of the event.

Technical Briefings

Due to the nature of Environment Canada's work, many media inquiries relate to areas which are technical in nature. Technical briefings provide an opportunity for Environment Canada subject matter experts to provide journalists with in-depth information on complex issues. When Media Relations, Communications Advisors and subject matter experts have determined that this approach could be helpful for Environment Canada to disseminate communications products and messages (generally in a communications strategy, plan or approach relating to scientific or technical data), Media Relations, or the appropriate Regional office, will ensure that the logistics are looked after and that a media advisory has been prepared and approved for distribution to media outlets.

Media Relations provides strategic advice and coaching to subject matter experts in preparation for the event. An explanation is provided on who will attend the briefing, what type of questions can be expected and how to address the proposed answers, highlighting key messages and areas of probable interest. Subject matter experts are also provided with an overview of how the briefing will unfold and, if required, with a mock simulation of the event.

Typically, technical briefings are not for attribution and take place prior to an announcement by the Minister. However, they can consist of a simple one-on-one discussion between a subject matter expert and a journalist. During either type of technical briefing, the preparation is similar and the rules are similar. Media Relations will ensure that all materials related to the briefing are available to journalists.

For those that relate to an upcoming announcement, Media Relations further ensures that any embargoed documents remain in the room until the appropriate time. For example, a document may be embargoed until it has been tabled in the House of Commons.

Typical sequence of events:

1. Opening remarks and introductions from Media Relations
2. Overview of the rules for the briefing:
 - The use of cell phones and blackberries is not permitted during the briefing
 - The session is off-the-record and is not for attribution
 - Journalists are asked to identify themselves and their media outlet prior to asking questions
 - One question and one follow-up
3. Question and answer session with subject matter experts
4. Closing remarks from Media Relations