Media Relations Protocol

Executive Management Committee
Bob Quinn
Communications Branch
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Environment Canada’s proposed Media Relations Protocol will guide the department in responding to calls from the media.

The protocol is based on consultation with other science-based departments, notably Agriculture and Agrifood Canada.

The protocol will represent the first formal policy on media relations.
Purpose

• To provide a clear policy on how media calls to Environment Canada are to be handled
• To ensure that media inquiries are responded to quickly, accurately and in a consistent manner across Canada
• To improve service to media by coordinating responses and ensuring that appropriate spokespeople are speaking to issues
• To coordinate responses and ensure that the responses to similar issues are consistent
• Environment Canada is one of only a few departments that does not have a media relations protocol

• Just as we have “one department, one website” we should have “one department, one voice”
Current Context

- No policy exists
- Media calls are answered individually by programmes and regions
- No overall sense of media activity coming in or going out of department
- No overall sense of who is speaking to the media
- Limited coordination of messages across the country
- Interviews sometimes result in surprises to Minister and Senior Management
How will it work

• Media relations at NHQ will coordinate all media calls coming into the department

• Upon receiving a media call, the recipient will inform their direct supervisor and contact media relations

• Media relations will work with individual staff to decide how to best handle the call; this could include:
  – Asking the programme expert to respond with approved lines
  – Having Media Relations respond
  – Referring the call to the Minister’s Office
  – Referring the call to another department

• Once the call is returned, Media Relations will log the call and close the file
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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.
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 or Environment Canada policy; or
- discuss advice given to the Minister, Cabinet or their superiors.
Role of Media Relations

- Media Relations officers:
  - Speak on behalf of the department
  - Liaise with other parts of the department to help ensure the department speaks with one voice
  - Facilitate media training/coaching
  - Log and track media calls
  - Work within communications to develop media lines on issues of interest to the media
  - Assist with organizing technical briefings and news conferences

- Media Relations has a dedicated email, media@ec.gc.ca, which is connected to a blackberry and monitored on an ongoing basis

- Media relations is also available after hours
What it means for the department

- Media Relations will serve as central coordinating function for media calls
- Experts will still be called upon to speak to their areas of expertise, where required, and input into media lines
- Calls should be returned only after running them through media relations
- OPG Board leads will need to provide updated lists of trained media spokespeople on a regular basis
- Due to volume and technical nature of inquiries, weather-related calls will continue to be handled through the Weather Media Access Line
Considerations

• Environment Canada is a science department, so we recognize that many calls will require an expert’s assistance.

• Scientists will still be encouraged to speak directly to the results of their work.

• Media relations is a client service organization, serving the department to ensure that messages are communicated clearly, quickly, accurately and in a consistent manner across Canada.
Key Contacts

Bob Quinn, Director-General of Communications
(bob.quinn@ec.gc.ca) (819) 997-6820

Gregory Jack, Manager, Ministerial Services
(gregory.jack@ec.gc.ca) (819) 934-1854

Miriam Wood, Senior Media Relations Advisor
(miriam.wood@ec.gc.ca) (819) 994-7499

Sujata Raisinghani, Media Relations Advisor
(sujata.raisinghani@ec.gc.ca) (819) 953-9738

Media Relations
(media@ec.gc.ca) (819) 934-8008 or 888-908-8008