

BC WILDFIRE SERVICE

Media Safety Guide

April 1, 2025



Wildfire access and safety information for media

The BC Wildfire Service is committed to keeping the public informed about wildfire activity throughout the province. When a fire spreads quickly and threatens a community it is critical the public has access to current information about the fire and our response.

The BC Wildfire Service appreciates the critical role of media in sharing accurate, independent information about wildfire activity and response in the service of the public interest. At the same time, wildfires are active work sites and the safety of staff, the public and any visitors, including media, is our top priority.

We strive to maintain a positive working relationship with media, with one of our key objectives being establishing and maintaining lines of communication with the public through the provision of timely and thorough information to the media.

The BC Wildfire Service understands the need for media to conduct independent, on-the-ground reporting and to gain access to wildfire work sites. We will work with media outlets on granting access to these sites as efficiently as possible, when safe to do so. Access requests are granted on a case-by-case basis.

Requesting access to a BC Wildfire Service worksite

Members of the media who wish to visit a wildfire work site must request permission to do so.

To request permission, please contact an Information Officer prior to visiting any BC Wildfire Service office, fire camp or work site. This includes all sites where firefighting crews are actively working or where firefighting equipment is being staged.

Information Officers are available at B.C.'s six regional fire centres as well as at the Provincial Wildfire Coordination Centre.

- Provincial Wildfire Coordination Centre: 250-312-3051; FIREINFO@gov.bc.ca
- Cariboo Fire Centre: 778-799-2100; BCWS.CAFCInformationOfficer@gov.bc.ca
- Coastal Fire Centre: 250-951-4209; BCWS.COFCInformationOfficer@gov.bc.ca
- Kamloops Fire Centre: 250-554-5965; KFCINFO@gov.bc.ca
- Northwest Fire Centre: 250-876-6844; BCWS.NWFCInformationOfficer@gov.bc.ca
- Prince George Fire Centre: 250-561-4629; IN-FOPG@gov.bc.ca
- Southeast Fire Centre: 250-318-7715; BCWS.SEFCInformationOfficer@gov.bc.ca

Preparing to visit a BC Wildfire Service worksite

The BC Wildfire Service adheres to strict safety rules. Under the *Workers Compensation Act*, the BC Wildfire Service is responsible for the safety of all individuals who attend a wildfire work site.

If you are granted permission to visit the scene of a wildfire, be aware you will be subject to site safety rules in addition to each media outlet's own WorkSafeBC policies.

Given the unpredictable nature of wildfires and wildfire behaviour, the final decision on access to a wildfire rests with the BC Wildfire Service, and permission to visit a wildfire may be revoked in the interest of safety.

If a media representative enters a wildfire site without permission, it not only jeopardizes that person's safety, but also the safety of firefighting crews. Such conduct may even force a halt to fire response operations (including air support) until that person is removed from the site.

Please respect the BC Wildfire Service's decisions regarding access to a wildfire, since entering the fire site without permission can directly affect firefighters' abil-

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ity to contain a fire.

We are dedicated to safeguarding all personnel within a fire site, including media professionals. Your efforts to help ensure safe worksite practices are maintained are greatly appreciated.

To gain access to a fire, members of the media will be escorted by trained staff to ensure safety. Members of the media must also wear appropriate clothing and carry the required personal protective equipment (PPE).

Required PPE (for fireline access):

- Hard hat*
- Hearing protection (Peltors, ear plugs, etcetera)*
- Whistle*
- Closed toed hiking boots, preferably with ankle coverage
- Clothing that fully covers the arms and legs. Avoid highly flammable synthetic fabrics such as nylon and polyester. Tightly woven clothes made from natural fibres, such as cotton, are recommended and fire-resistant clothing is best.
- Personal first aid kit*

Required PPE (for non-fireline access, e.g., fire camp)

- Hard hat*
- Hearing protection*
- Closed toed hiking boots, preferably with ankle coverage

Suggested PPE:

- Eye protection (CSA approved)
- Hand protection (gloves)
- High visible apparel (mandatory on roadside and around heavy equipment)

** PPE denoted with an asterisk can be provided by the BC Wildfire Service, if and when required. Speak to an Information Officer about PPE requirements.*

Media will be provided details about the fire, pertinent

safety information and site access protocols. This information may be provided at the site or by telephone.

When on-site at a BC Wildfire Service worksite

A BC Wildfire Service representative will be assigned to the media representative and safety rules will be discussed. Always stay with this designated representative at the worksite. Follow their instructions.

When on the fireline, the risk of exposure to environmental factors like smoke, wildfire, embers, danger trees, ash pits, etcetera is always present. This dynamic environment changes by the minute and safety must be constantly re-evaluated. Below is a non-exclusive list of some key identified safety issues.

Safety best practices:

- Do not enter a worksite until you have received a site-specific briefing and reviewed the Field Safety Plan (FSP)
- Be aware of rolling debris and falling trees. Especially with changing conditions (e.g., wind, rain, drought)
- Do not engage in any fireline activities (hosing, burning, chainsaw operations, gear carry, etcetera)
- Use caution around heavy machinery and do not approach until cleared to do so
- Stay at least two tree lengths away from tree-falling activities
- No not approach workers when operating chainsaws or hand tools until cleared to do so
- Stay up wind and far away from any non-vegetative smoke
- Follow all forest service road calling procedures
- NEVER approach a helicopter pad, a parked helicopter, or a hot (blades spinning) helicopter, without a formal briefing

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- Understand heat stress protocols and ensure adequate water, and you are physically fit for hiking
- All injuries must be reported to identified supervisor and designated first aid attendant

General rules:

- The media outlet's appointed supervisor has the authority and responsibility to correct any unsafe activity.
- BC Wildfire Service officials have the authority to restrict or limit access to a site.
- A BC Wildfire Service representative will provide relevant safety information and will communicate and review site hazards for media at the fire site.
- If instructions are not followed, violator(s) may be required to leave the site.
- Continual safety violators may be reported to WorkSafeBC or Labour Canada for further follow up.

Aviation specific rules:

- All forest fires have an automatic airspace restriction around them, per Canadian Aviation Regulations. The airspace is automatically restricted within five nautical miles of a fire to an altitude of 3,000 feet above ground level, unless a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) is issued that describes different airspace restrictions.
- Without explicit authorization, the operation of any aircraft not associated with fire activities within this area, including drones and helicopters, is illegal.
- It is illegal to enter forest fire restricted airspace without prior authorization.
- If a media outlet wants to request air access to a restricted area, it must contact a fire Information Officer. Access may be granted if conditions are appropriate and it is safe to do so. If there is a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) in place for the wildfire,

the pilot must check the NOTAM for any other specific restrictions.

- The operation of drones near an active wildfire is illegal and extremely dangerous, especially when low-flying firefighting aircraft are present.
- Transport Canada and the BC Wildfire Service explicitly prohibit the use of drones of any size near a wildfire. Violating these rules jeopardizes the lives of aircrews and those on the ground and could interfere with fire suppression activities. For safety reasons, if a drone is detected in the restricted airspace over a wildfire, the BC Wildfire Service will ground all of its aircraft that are nearby until the drone has left the area.
- More information about drone safety is available on the Transport Canada website: <https://www.tc.gc.ca/en/services/aviation/drone-safety.html>

For any questions about employer safety responsibilities, media outlets can contact the following organizations:

For print media outlets:

WorkSafeBC - Prevention Division 604-276-3100 in the Lower Mainland, 1-888-621-7233 toll-free within B.C. www.worksafebc.com

For radio and television media outlets:

Government of Canada - Labour Program 1-800-641-4049 <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/labour-contact.html>

Contact:

Information Officer
BC Wildfire Service
Provincial Wildfire Coordination Centre
FIREINFO@gov.bc.ca
250-312-3051

Connect with the Province of B.C. at: news.gov.bc.ca/