
WILDFIRE SAFETY INFORMATION FOR MEDIA

For Immediate Release
June 18, 2021

Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations
and Rural Development
BC Wildfire Service

Updated media protocols in response to COVID-19

KAMLOOPS – The British Columbia government is committed to keeping the public informed about wildfire activity in the province.

In response to the ongoing pandemic, the BC Wildfire Service has implemented updated media protocols to reduce and mitigate the risks of COVID-19 for our media partners and our staff members. Until further notice, media interviews will be held virtually whenever possible. Staff members will be available for interviews by phone, Skype or other online tools. In certain circumstances, face-to-face interviews may be considered based on situational or operational needs. All in-person interviews must be pre-approved and current COVID-19 safety protocols must be followed.

Additionally, we are unable to provide helicopter flights to members of the media because revised aviation protocols are in place. Other requests, such as visits to fire camps, may be declined depending on the situation and health guidelines that are in place at the time.

For the safety and health of fireline workers, any member of the media who wishes to visit the scene of a fire must request permission to do so. Where possible, the BC Wildfire Service will provide opportunities for its media partners to visit the scene of a wildfire.

The BC Wildfire Service will continue to work with its media partners to provide accurate and timely information about active wildfires during the 2021 wildfire season.

Note: Given the unpredictable nature of wildfires and wildfire behaviour, the final decision on providing access to a wildfire rests with the wildfire's incident commander, and initial 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' ability to contain a fire.

To request permission, please contact an information officer prior to visiting any BC Wildfire Service office, fire camp or worksite. This includes all sites where firefighting crews are actively working or where firefighting equipment is being staged. Whenever possible, information officers will provide relevant photos and videos to media and to the public through social media and the BC Wildfire Service website. 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

Coastal Fire Centre: 250 951-4209; BCWS.COFCInformationOfficer@gov.bc.ca

Cariboo Fire Centre: 778 799-2100; BCWS.CAFCInformationOfficer@gov.bc.ca

Prince George Fire Centre: 250 318-7768; BCWS.PGFCInformationOfficer@gov.bc.ca

Kamloops Fire Centre: 250 554-5965; BCWS.KFCInformationOfficer@gov.bc.ca

Southeast Fire Centre: 250 318-7715; BCWS.SEFCInformationOfficer@gov.bc.ca

Northwest Fire Centre: 250 876-7768; BCWS.NWFCInformationOfficer@gov.bc.ca

1. **In order to be escorted around a fire site, members of the media must wear appropriate clothing and a removeable non-medical mask or face covering large enough to cover their mouth and nose.** Appropriate clothing includes a hard hat and 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 are recommended. A high-visibility vest and eye protection may be required. Footwear suitable for rough terrain is essential.
2. **A BC Wildfire Service representative will be assigned to the media representative and safety rules will be discussed.** Stay with this designated representative at all times at the worksite. Follow his or her instructions.

To ensure media compliance with health and safety regulations, the BC Wildfire Service requires them to adhere to the rules listed below:

General

- The media outlet's appointed supervisor has the authority and responsibility to correct any unsafe activity.
- The incident commander has 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 staff at the fire site.
- If this representative's instructions are disregarded, the incident commander may require the violator(s) to leave the site.
- Continual safety violators may be reported to WorkSafeBC or Labour Canada for further follow up.

Aircraft operations

- All wildfires are automatically considered to be "flight restricted", according to Canadian Aviation Regulations. The restricted area includes a radius of five nautical miles around a fire to an altitude of 3,000 feet above ground level.

- The operation of any aircraft not associated with fire suppression activities within this area, including drones and helicopters, is illegal.
- It should not be assumed that it is clear to enter the airspace outside of this area. It is illegal to enter restricted airspace without prior approval from the BC Wildfire Service.
- 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 unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs, or “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 can jeopardize the lives of aircrews and those on the ground and inhibit fire suppression activities. For safety reasons, if a drone is detected in the restricted airspace over a wildfire, the BC Wildfire Service will ground any 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>

Stay alert:

- Know the escape routes. Ask if unsure or if there are any other concerns.
- Watch out for rolling debris that may be dislodged by fire suppression activity.
- Stay away from windfalls, weakened trees, loose rocks and hot spots.
- Ride only in standard vehicles, not heavy machinery. Always wear a seatbelt.
- Use caution around machinery and only approach when in full view of the operator.
- Stay at least two tree lengths away from tree-falling activities.
- Stay clear of airtanker drop areas and helicopter landing areas.
- Have plenty of water on hand to prevent dehydration.
- Any injury must be reported and treated.

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:

Labour Program

1 800 641-4049

Thank you for respecting these protocols. We will continue to work with you to ensure that British Columbians receive the wildfire information they need, while we reduce the risk of COVID-19 exposure for all BC Wildfire Service employees and our media partners.

Contact:

Fire 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/connect