Media Relations Protocol

Executive Management Committee
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Communications Branch
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Introduction

- 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
Guiding Principles

• 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

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