



## **WORKING WITH EMERGENCY RESPONSE AGENCIES**

**Protocols for media outlets and personnel  
attending emergency incidents**



**FOREST FIRE  
MANAGEMENT VICTORIA**

## INTENT

The intent of these protocols is to assist media and emergency response agencies to work safely and effectively at an incident under the direction of the Incident Controller.

This protocol guides the working relationship between media outlets, media personnel and emergency response agencies at significant fire and bushfire incidents (referred to as 'incidents').

Media play a vital role during incidents to communicate timely and relevant information to the public and relationships between media and agencies should be characterised by cooperation, goodwill, and understanding.

It is essential that all personnel, from an emergency response agency or media outlet, understand the risks and dangers to human life with incidents such as bushfires and other emergencies and they are dynamic by nature.

## PROTOCOL

### Minimum requirements for attending an incident scene

1.1 In order to gain access to a fireground, media personnel must have:

- Current Media Accreditation based on the successful completion and renewal of the 'Maintain Safety for Media' online course.  
For details on media accreditation process, visit: [news.cfa.vic.gov.au/news-media/media-room](https://news.cfa.vic.gov.au/news-media/media-room) or email [mediaaccreditation@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:mediaaccreditation@cfa.vic.gov.au)
- A current media accreditation card, which will be issued upon the completion of the Maintain Safety for Media online course, and an up-to-date photo provided. Any media accreditation cards that have expired will not be accepted.

Personal Protective Clothing & Equipment (PPC&E) in line with relevant Australian Standards. (Current Standards are set out in **Appendix Three – PPC&E Guideline**). Note that PPC&E may be required at incidents other than bushfires and must have permanent "media" markings. All PPE, including helmets are required to be worn at all times on the fireground, including during interviews and pieces to camera. Pictures or images of media personnel on the fireground without PPE will be considered a breach of these protocols and followed up with the relevant individual or agency (*this para may be more appropriate in different section*).

1.2 To attend an incident, media must agree to operate within the arrangements, processes and decisions set out in these protocols and to abide by the direction of the Incident Controller or their nominated delegate throughout the duration of the incident. At a bushfire or other incident where an incident management has been activated, media must liaise directly with the Media Officer or Public Information Officer to gain approval from the Incident Controller to access the fireground.

1.3 It is the responsibility of media to seek information and ensure they are aware of control arrangements in place, including the incident scene boundaries designated by the Incident Controller. Especially early in an incident, there will not always be physical signs or barriers in place to mark closed roads or tracks – Monitor the VicEmergency App or website and use warning

boundaries (black, red, orange and yellow) areas as a guide until you can confirm with the Incident Control Centre, Incident Controller or their delegate.

- 1.4 To qualify for CFA/FFMVic media accreditation, an individual must be one of the following:
- Employed by a recognised media organisation based in Victoria (3-year accreditation issued)\*\*
  - Employed by a recognised international media organisation with plans to attend specific incidents in Victoria only in the near future (1-year accreditation issued\*)
  - A freelancer commissioned by a recognised media organisation to attend specific incidents in Victoria only in the near future (3-year accreditation issued)
- 1.5 It is up to the discretion of the CFA and DEECA/FFMVic media teams to determine what constitutes a recognised media organisation. Social media channels without evidence of producing local news or operating in line with journalistic principles are not considered recognised media organisations.

\*The media representative only has to do the Maintain Safety course every three years, but the accreditation will be issued for 12 months at a time, dependent on confirmation of status.

\*\* CFA/FFMVic media accreditation is recognised nationally. NSW RFS and other states accreditation is also recognised in Victoria. However, note that media access to the fireground is managed differently in different states.

## ACCESS

***Note that reference to the 'Incident Controller' in this section may refer to the individual fulfilling this role, or to their nominated delegate.***

- 2.1 Incident Management Teams may scale up or down (adding more or fewer roles) in line with the requirements of the incident. The Incident Controller bears ultimate responsibility for all decisions taken throughout the duration of an incident, including the safety of all individuals at an incident scene.
- 2.2 Media representatives wishing to attend an incident must first contact the control agency media or Media Officer or Public Information Officer for details about incident boundaries, closures and access. (See **Appendix Two 'Contacts'** for details).
- 2.3 The media unit/officer will advise on relevant arrangements in place for the incident. This may include a local contact number, or the location of a staging area, Incident Control Centre or other designated gathering point for media.
- 2.4 On arrival at the designated gathering point, media wishing to enter the incident scene boundaries must first seek and gain permission of the Incident Controller (via the Media Officer or Public Information Officer if these roles have been activated). Media representatives will also be required to have their Media Accreditation Card and correct PPE.
- 2.5 Access to an incident scene is **not** guaranteed. Safety is the number one priority and access – and any provisions or conditions – will be granted at the discretion of the Incident Controller. Agencies will **not** organise access into private residences or for interviews with impacted landholders in the incident scene. It can be extremely distressing to property owners to learn of property, stock or asset loss by news broadcast before they have been formally notified.

- 2.6 Passage to an incident scene may require progression through a Traffic Management Point (TMP). On arrival, personnel staffing the TMP (usually Victoria Police) may contact the Incident Control Centre to determine whether it is safe to proceed.
- 2.7 Depending on the level of risk or status of the incident, media may need to be escorted by a suitably qualified and endorsed member of a response agency as they go through the TMP and at all times within the designated incident scene boundaries. If media have been approved access to the incident, they must remain with their designated escort at all times. If media ignore advice from the designated escort, they will be asked to leave the incident immediately and if they choose to ignore this direction, Victoria Police will be contacted to escort them from the scene and their media accreditation will be removed.

**2.8 Traffic Management Point Categories\***  
*From Joint Standard Operating Procedure SOP J03.10*

Access level		ID/authorisation	Responsibility and authority
<b>A</b>	<b>Emergency Services Only Access - Media generally not permitted access. If permitted, media escort must be in place.</b>	Agency media accreditation and media escort (if authorised)	Control agency
<b>B</b>	<b>Essential Services Access - Media may be granted access</b> under escort by emergency services personnel	Agency media accreditation and media escort arranged (from staging area)	
<b>C</b>	<b>Authorised Access – Media generally granted access</b> without escort – Local community/residents and media generally granted access without escort	Agency media accreditation	
<b>D</b>	<b>Authorised Access – Media generally granted access</b> Agency no longer requires TMP, but the road owner requires TMP to address road-related issues. Closed to public, open to local community/residents and media.	Agency media accreditation	Road authority
<b>OPEN</b>	Open to all	Not required, open to all	

\*Note this is indicative only – permission may vary at the discretion of the Incident Controller.

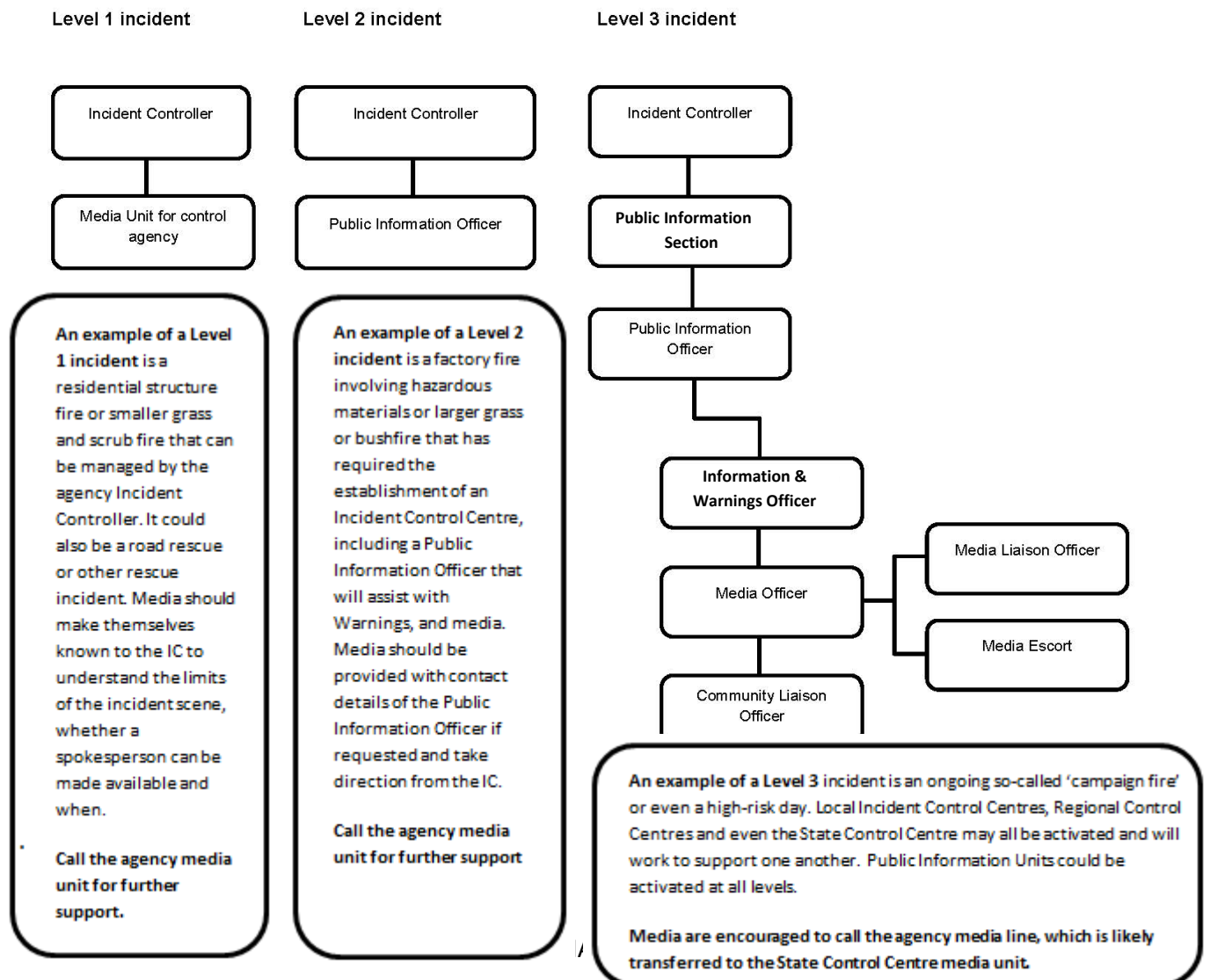
- 2.9 On arrival at the incident scene, media **must** make their presence known to emergency response agencies and formally register their attendance if asked to do so.
- 2.10 Within the incident scene, a Media Officer may assist by:
- Providing a safety briefing
  - Ensuring appropriate communication arrangements are in place
  - Arranging a media escort
  - Providing or relaying instructions based on the current status of the incident
  - Arranging media interviews
  - Checking Media Accreditation Cards are valid
  - Ensuring media have the correct PPE
  - Ensuring the media have an appropriate vehicle, such as a 4WD if required.

## REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS

### Reporting arrangements for media representatives at bushfires

3.1 Media personnel can seek information from the respective control agency media team, Media Officer or Public Information Officer about the incident classification.

Incident Classification	Description
<b>Level 1</b>	Level 1 incidents are generally able to be resolved through the use of local or initial response resources only.
<b>Level 2</b>	Level 2 incidents are more complex either in size, resources or risk. They are characterised by the need for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• deployment of resources beyond initial response; or</li> <li>• sectorisation of the incident; or</li> <li>• the establishment of functional sections due to the levels of complexity; or</li> <li>• a combination of the above.</li> </ul>
<b>Level 3</b>	Level 3 incidents are characterised by degrees of complexity that may require the establishment of divisions for effective management of the situation. These incidents will usually involve delegation of all functions. It can take time for all functions to be filled when an incident escalates quickly. Media escort and liaison may not be immediately available to facilitate media access. Media must stay out of closed areas of the incident scene during this time.



## NON-COMPLIANCE

- 4.1 Media who do not follow these protocols, particularly if accessing an incident scene unescorted, will be asked to leave immediately. Emergency response agencies or police personnel required to deal with breaches of these protocols may be diverted from other high-priority tasks or may be forced to enter unsafe situations. **It is the responsibility of media outlets** to ensure the actions of their employees are consistent with the Victorian Occupational Health and Safety legislation.
- 4.2 It is the responsibility of media to ensure they are aware of incident scene boundaries as designated by the Incident Controller and adhere to those boundaries.
- 4.3 Victoria Police officers will remove media representatives from an incident scene who:
- Are endangering their own lives or the lives of others.
  - Fail to meet minimum requirements for attending an incident scene (see **Minimum requirements for attending an incident scene**).
  - Fail to comply with instructions from emergency management staff, including a police member or the Incident Controller.
  - Fail to depart immediately from the fire ground after instructed to do so.
- 4.4 Following breaches of this protocol the following actions may be taken:
- Formal notification provided to WorkSafe.
  - Individual media representative banned for the duration of the incident.
  - Media agency as a whole banned for the duration of the incident.
  - Individual media accreditation rescinded.
  - Written warning to the media agency's Chief of Staff and OH&S representative.

## ISSUES AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION

- 5.1 Where safe to do so, it is always preferable that issues or disputes concerning these protocols be raised with the Media Officer or delegate on scene or Incident Control Centre rather than the crew at the incident scene before formal measures are taken (as outlined in paragraph 4.4 and 5.2).
- 5.2 The Incident Controller or his/her delegate (such as the Public Information Officer or State Control Centre Media Unit) will lead any dispute resolution procedures. These may include discussions with the Chief of Staff around OH&S responsibilities.
- 5.3 If media have any issues or queries about the classification or enforcement of specific safety protocols or TMPs in the field, they can contact the Incident Control Centre or agency media unit, if applicable.



## REVIEW

The operation of this Protocol will be subject to review and analysis by the fire agencies prior to the commencement of each fire season.

**Jason Heffernan**  
**Chief Officer**  
Country Fire Authority

5 September 2024

**Chris Hardman**  
**Chief Fire Officer**  
Forest Fire Management Victoria

23 September 2024

## APPENDIX ONE – GLOSSARY

Media outlet	Any recognised newsgathering organisation or agency.
Media personnel	Any individual employed or contracted to perform media-related duties for or by a media outlet, or acting in a self-employment or freelance basis in the media field.
Media Officer	The individual responsible for managing media at incidents. This includes managing media enquiries, organising media escorts and interviews.
Public Information Officer	The Public Information Officer is responsible for delivering public information and warnings that are authoritative, consistently constructed and relevant for all Victorians and visitors in all emergencies. Provide timely and tailored information that supports the community to make informed decisions before, during and after emergencies. The media officer reports to the Public Information Officer.
Control Agency	The agency, service, organisation or authority which, by legislative authority, is responsible for the control of an incident.
Traffic Management Point	A point established to control access to the incident scene, managing the entry of residents, media, emergency services and essential services. Usually controlled by Victoria Police or other emergency services resources. Access categories change as the incident requires.
Media Assembly Point	The location identified by the Incident Controller or their delegate as being the safe location for media representatives to gather at the incident scene. Media Assembly Points are most often designated at structure fires or large bushfires.
Media Accreditation Card	The acknowledgement provided to media representatives who have completed and been assessed by CFA as competent and current in 'Maintain Safety at CFA Incidents. The media accreditation card must be displayed at all times when attending an incident, passing through Traffic Management Points and on the fire ground. Media Accreditation Cards do not guarantee access to a fireground or other incident scene. Access is always at the discretion of the Incident Controller.
Incident	From SEMP? include 'calls for human intervention' from incident scene definition.
Incident Controller	The individual responsible for the management of all emergency response activities across an incident. The Incident Controller also sets the boundaries of an incident.
Incident Control Centre	The facility where the Incident Controller and



	Incident Management Team manage emergency response activities, following the transfer of control from the first responders on scene.
Incident Scene	<p>An event, occurrence or set of circumstances that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Field location from which the Incident Controller operates</li> <li>• Has a definite spatial extent</li> <li>• Has a definite duration</li> <li>• Calls for human intervention</li> <li>• Has a set of concluding conditions that can be defined</li> <li>• Is or will be under the control of an individual who has the authority to make decisions about the means by which it will be brought to an end</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX TWO – MEDIA CONTACTS

### State Control Centre Media

**Phone: 03 8684 7166** (*Relevant agency media lines are forwarded to the State Control Centre when it is activated.*)

The State Control Centre media unit may be activated in preparedness for, response to, or recovery from an emergency across Victoria.

The CFA media line will be forwarded to the State Control Centre media unit when it is activated for any of these reasons in relation to bushfires.

The State Control Centre media unit is staffed by Victorian public service staff from a range of government departments and agencies. While they have been trained, they are not always familiar with all aspects of the on-ground media accreditation and media access process. Media can always ask for their question to be escalated to the Media Officer or to be referred to the CFA media duty officer on call.

### CFA Media

**Phone: 1300 CFA MED(IA) - 1300 232 633**

Please note that outside business hours (7am-6pm Mon-Fri), the CFA Media line is diverted to an operational communications team that is also managing emergency incidents on behalf of the organisation.

During the bushfire season, the media line is often diverted to the State Control Centre when it is activated for major bushfires or high bushfire risk.

### FFMVic Media

**Phone: 03 8624 3400 (non-incident)**

Phone diverts to on-call person after hours.

**SCC Media Phone: 8684 7166 (during incident)** OFFICIAL

Please note bush or structure fires on private land (other than those within the FRV inner-metropolitan area and built-up areas on the suburban fringe and in regional centres – please see map at [frv.vic.gov.au/response-area](http://frv.vic.gov.au/response-area)) are generally managed by CFA. Bushfires that occur in Victoria's National Parks and State Forests are generally managed by FFMVic.

The fire and emergency agencies work closely in support of each other. A range of agencies assist to staff the State Control Centre during the fire season.

Either agency's media unit should be able to assist if you are unsure which agency is managing a particular incident. View current incidents at [emergency.vic.gov.au](http://emergency.vic.gov.au)

## APPENDIX THREE – Personal Protective Clothing & Equipment (PPC&E) Guidelines

It is mandatory that any member of the media attending a bushfire is wearing appropriate protective clothing on the fire ground. This must be procured/supplied by the individual or their outlet. Any media representatives found not using appropriate PPC&E may be removed from a fire ground or incident scene for their own safety.

Media may also be required to wear their PPC&E during major incidents such as factory fires or hazardous materials incidents. CFA recommends that media have PPC&E with them when attending any fire-related incident.

Each media representative on the fire ground must have all of the below items as part of their individual kit. Each item must meet the relevant Australian Standard.

Item	Standard	Additional information
Bushfire Helmet	AS/NZS 1801.Type 3	Helmet should be blue with the word 'media' printed in white lettering on both sides of the helmet.
Bushfire Coat and Pants (or overalls)	AS/NZS 4824: 2006	N/A
Patches		Patches with the word 'MEDIA' to be affixed to the upper back, front left pocket and right sleeve of the overalls.
Goggles	AS/NZS 1337	N/A
Firefighting Boots	AS/NZS 4824: Type 1 or Type 2	N/A
Disposable P2Class Respirator	AS/NZS 1716 or EN 149	N/A
Firefighting Gloves	AS/NZS 2161.6 Type 1	N/A



For more information, including details of suppliers, please contact CFA Media: **1300 CFA MED(IA) (1300 232 633)** or [cfamedia@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:cfamedia@cfa.vic.gov.au)