



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

BLM Fire

Understanding the News Media

Freedom of the press is protected by the First Amendment to ensure citizens have access to information not regulated by the government.

Most journalists consider themselves defenders of the “public’s right to know.”

Expect reporters to be especially interested in stories that offer intriguing angles (structures threatened, evacuations, fire costs, fire management, or anything that may affect the taxpayers).

Expect a reporter to probe for information, and to challenge assertions made by the agency verbally or in print.

Do not assume that probing or challenging questions indicate a bias or hostility on the part of the reporter. It may, but it may be more likely that the reporter is simply trying to understand the matter about which he/she is writing.

Do not assume the reporter knows everything you know about a situation, or that the reporter knows nothing. It’s ok to ask the reporter what their background knowledge is prior to beginning an interview.

Consider the difficulty of the task facing the journalist: compile a lot of information in a brief period of time in a manner readable to someone with a sixth grade education. To help the reporter write a well-informed story, do what you can to translate complex topics in a way that makes sense to the average person.

EVERY reporter has a deadline. Don’t let their deadline determine the quality of information you provide to them. However, try to accommodate their deadline to the best of your ability, without compromising the message you are trying to convey.