



Royal Canadian Marine Search & Rescue **MEDIA HANDBOOK**



COMMUNICATION
MEDIA



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FOREWORD

Whether you are planning a fundraising barbecue or preparing for an interview following a major SAR incident, your role as an RCM-SAR media liaison officer is important for your station and for RCM-SAR. Thank you for the many hours you contribute to this role, and for taking the time to read this Media Handbook.

This handbook provides a quick overview of the media environment in which RCM-SAR operates as a public safety service and volunteer organization. It has some tips for keeping our messaging consistent and professional, and some helpful hints on dealing with mainstream and social media.

As in all other areas of RCM-SAR, you have lots of support. If you have questions or need help, don't hesitate to contact staff at the RCM-SAR head office or your colleagues from neighbouring stations. Together we will make sure that the media and the public hear about the excellent work of RCM-SAR's volunteers.



WHY DO WE DO PUBLIC RELATIONS?

RCM-SAR has a wonderful story to tell, and it is important that people know about our impact on public safety in British Columbia. Good media relations helps us in several ways:

- Raising awareness
- Supporting fundraising
- Boosting recruiting
- Recognizing volunteers
- Connecting us to the communities we serve

As a charity, RCM-SAR competes with other organizations for the donations that keep our crews well-trained and well-equipped. We owe it to the communities that support us to demonstrate the vital role we play. It is a way to say thanks and to build on-going support.

Media can help tell our story and ultimately help us save lives on the water.

USING MEDIA TO SUPPORT OUR MISSION

We can use the media to gain positive coverage for:

- Rescue operations
- Community event SAR patrols
- Fundraising campaigns
- Volunteer recognition
- Corporate news
- Boating safety education

We also use the media to protect RCM-SAR's public image by monitoring coverage, countering negative coverage, and managing issues that arise.



ROLES AT RCM-SAR

Head Office:

- Sets strategic communications direction
- Manages regional media relations and significant incidents
- Maintains a 24-hour media line
- Administers RCM-SAR web site, blog, Facebook and Twitter feeds
- Liaises with Department of National Defence Public Affairs and Canadian Coast Guard communications staff on major incidents
- Issues regional news releases via commercial distribution services

Stations:

- Look for opportunities to inform media and the public about station activities
- Liaise with head office on significant incidents
- Maintain station web sites and social media
- Maintain contacts with local media
- Prepare news releases and media invitations for local events

RCM-SAR'S MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

Some things you should know about RCM-SAR and the media:

- *Royal Canadian Marine Search and Rescue* is a relatively new brand, and since being introduced in 2012 has really caught on with the media and the public.
- We switched to the new brand in part because the media and public would often confuse “Coast Guard Auxiliary” with the Coast Guard. That reduced public awareness of our volunteers and hampered our fundraising and recruiting. We promote the new brand as much as possible.
- Media, especially local media, are very supportive of RCM-SAR. Our volunteers are community heroes and our organization has an excellent reputation as a deserving charity. We work hard to preserve that reputation and avoid any issues that would tarnish it.
- We have a very small communications budget, so we look for ways to earn media coverage by nurturing our connections with reporters and being creative.
- We are a key part of the west coast marine SAR system, handling about a third of marine emergency calls. We look for opportunities to explain that context.
- We recognize the other players in the SAR system as our “partners on the water”. We avoid giving the media the impression that we compete with Coast Guard, port authorities, ground SAR, or other service providers, and we make a point of acknowledging our partners' involvement and support.
- We work with Department of National Defence Public Affairs and the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre during major incidents. Our primary role is to provide volunteer marine maritime rescue services to the federal government through our Contribution Agreement with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. On the west coast, maritime search and rescue is the responsibility of the Admiral in charge of Maritime Forces Pacific. That's why RCM-SAR is included in the Department of National Defence Public Affairs Plan, and why we work with DND staff during major incidents.
- We are an independent organization and are free to handle media as we see fit, however we generally align our media practices with those of DND and CCG in that we protect privacy and don't disrupt ongoing SAR operations.

“MAINSTREAM” MEDIA

The media landscape is rapidly changing, but traditional outlets such as newspapers, radio and television are still important.

As a Media Liaison Officer you have probably already established a relationship with your local reporters and keep them posted on your station's activities. This knowledge of your local media is really valuable. As well as that one-on-one contact, consider other tools like news releases and media invitations.

In addition to newsworthy rescues, reporters are looking for stories that have human interest, drama, or information useful to their audience. This could include:

- Training and SAREXs
- Boating safety
- Events
- Vessels
- Member profiles
- Community outreach
- Unusual events, such as members providing first aid at a road accident, or RCM-SAR members getting married
- Testimonials or thanks from those we rescue
- Station history
- Good photos or video
- Superlatives like newest, biggest, smallest
- Kids
- Animals
- Humour

Often you can generate a story with a quick call or email to a reporter. Alternatively you can prepare a formal news release. Please send news releases to the Director of Marketing and Communications (media@rcmsar.com) before they go out. This is for a final check on the text and to provide background information to Head Office in the event reporters call the 24 hour Media Line. Remember that news releases about significant SAR incidents must be coordinated through the director and DND Public Affairs.



SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE INTERNET

Many stations have found that an active web site, Facebook page and Twitter feed are excellent ways to keep their members and the public informed. We encourage you to embrace these powerful tools, especially as more and more reporters are monitoring our social media outlets for tips on RCM-SAR activities. These sites are great for getting information out quickly. However, be aware of some risks:

- Posting during a mission can cause distraction for the crew, the release of incomplete or inaccurate information, disruption of the SAR operation, a breach of personal privacy, or the impression that we're "posting instead of rescuing". That's why it is against RCM-SAR policy to post while a mission is underway.
- Take your time. There is no prize for being the first to post, and – unlike scanner hobbyists or citizen journalists – we have a responsibility for the information we release. We need to get it right. Incorrect posts live forever on the internet.

- Don't take the bait. Social media trolls are irritating but usually not worth engaging. If you do respond, use humour, tact, and facts.
- Even if you are posting as an individual, your views may be taken as those of RCM-SAR. It can get awkward.
- Your words and pictures could be used without your knowledge or out of context. A casual blog post can quickly become a "statement by RCM-SAR". You may find yourself being sought for comment.
- Take care to protect privacy. Avoid vessel names and never release victims' names without their express permission.
- Check that your images show best SAR practices and our crews in the best light. People are quick to criticize improper techniques, gear, or clothing. It can take a long time to repair our reputation.

With that in mind, by all means make the most of social media to get your message out. Consider a GoPro or other video camera to capture rescues, exercises, and special moments. Video is great for public relations as well as training and record-keeping. Post lots of photos, especially of members working hard. Look for human interest stories that will capture your readers' imagination and help their understanding of what we do.

And please share! The head office team loves to promote station stories through the regional RCM-SAR social media feeds, web site, and Compass newsletter. We can boost the audience for your stories, and are always looking for fresh content and welcome all submissions. If you have an item of regional interest, please send it to info@rcmsar.com. We subscribe to most station social media feeds but don't always see everything, so please flag items of interest so we can share your stories.



MAJOR INCIDENTS

It is almost inevitable that your station will be involved in a major incident that will attract significant media attention. You should have a plan in place.

Examples of major incidents are loss of life, large number of casualties, unusually challenging sea or weather conditions, extended search times, large multi-agency operations, or a human interest element that triggers media interest.

Here are some things to plan for:

- When a major incident occurs, contact the Director of Marketing and Communications right away.
- The Director will work with you to plan a media response, including handling initial calls from reporters on the Media Line so you can focus on the SAR operation or crew debrief.
- Together we will determine what information should be released, when, and by whom.
- We will work with Department of National Defense Public Affairs and Canadian Coast Guard communications staff to coordinate information. This will avoid misinformation or inconsistent statements.
- If the SAR event warrants a formal news release, we will coordinate with the office of the Admiral responsible for SAR on the west coast.
- Together we will coordinate content and timing of any social media posts.
- We will encourage media to highlight the involvement and professional response of our volunteers.
- We will help plan any media follow-up after the event.

For routine missions of mostly local interest, there's no need to contact head office. Go ahead and keep your local media informed of community-related activity.

MEDIA ON BOARD

Taking members of the media on the water in an RCM-SAR rescue vessel is a good way to show what volunteer rescue crews do and help create a positive public image of the marine SAR community. We take care to ensure that members of the media are kept safe while aboard and that their presence does not affect a SAR mission.

Insurance coverage is in place that allows us to take guests, including media, on board for authorized non-SAR activities. Media rides must be authorized by your Station Leader and the RCM-SAR Director of Marketing and Communications. Most will be quickly approved by email or a phone call. This is simply a safeguard against bringing media aboard at times when there may be broader issues in play that could affect RCM-SAR as a whole.

If you get a tasking while media are on board, the media should be taken ashore. If time is of the essence, they may remain on board at the coxswain's discretion with a request that they follow his or her instructions at all times. Please refer to the RCM-SAR policies regarding Guests and Media Rides.



IF YOU GET A CALL FROM A REPORTER

Don't panic! This is an opportunity for your station and RCM-SAR. Here are some things to keep in mind if you are asked for an interview.

- You have time. A reporter will likely not need the interview immediately. They do need to know if they can get an interview before their deadline, or if there is someone else they should talk to. They will understand if you need some time to gather information and prepare. Don't imply "no comment" – only that we take their request seriously and will get back to them.
- Get the details of the request: what the story topic will be, what information they need, the interview format (e.g. phone or in person, live or recorded), what their deadline is, and their contact details.
- If you're ready, go for it. However, if it involves an ongoing SAR operation, multiple agencies, a complex or controversial issue, "bad news", or broader RCM-SAR policy, call the Director of Marketing and Communications to discuss. Call 778 352-1006.
- If appropriate, use the opportunity to communicate our key messages to promote the work of our volunteers and the value of our public safety charity.
- Don't try to memorize a script. Just know your information and speak from the heart, especially following a challenging SAR call. It is ok for the public to see the difficult work we do.
- If you're being videoed or photographed, please wear RCM-SAR attire. Our "uniform" is our SAR vests and other RCM-SAR branded gear that contributes to our professional image.
- Remember that in most cases you are representing your RCM-SAR station, not your local fundraising society. We promote the fact that we have more than 40 stations and 1,200 volunteers serving British Columbia. It bolsters our image as a serious and capable search and rescue organization.

KEY MESSAGES

Here is information about RCM-SAR that we emphasize in our communications.

- **RCM-SAR is a key part of the marine rescue system on the West Coast and in the Interior.**
- **We are an all-volunteer charity that saves lives on the water.**
- **Our crews are ready to be called out at any time, day or night, in any kind of weather.**
- **The people at our more than 40 rescue stations respond to a total average of 800 marine emergencies every year.**
- **We train hard. Our crews all have first aid and marine certifications, and we provide great rescue service to the public.**
- **We are connected to our communities. We rely on our neighbours for fundraising support and volunteer help. We invite you to join us.**
- **Please support us with a donation at www.rcmsar.com**

You may wish to develop your own list of key messages about your station.



WEBSITE TASKINGS FEATURE

The www.rcmsar.com website has a feature on its home page that automatically shows callouts for stations that use the ConnectRocket paging system. Media should be aware that the information has a built-in delay to avoid disrupting SAR operations or generating calls to JRCC. There is a half-hour delay for information posted to the web page and a four-hour delay before it automatically appears on Twitter. The feature is intended to give the public a sense of our call volume and geographical reach. It is not a media alerting system.

Media should also be aware that not all RCM-SAR vessels have AIS transponders, and that the various public websites that track vessel positions do not always display real-time information.

TESTIMONIALS

Testimonials from the people we rescue are a powerful way to inform the media and public about our important role. As you gather contact information for your vessel log, consider asking permission to contact people at a later date about telling the story of their rescue. It is important to ensure their consent, but many people are happy to publicly thank us and share their adventure. These stories help support our crew recognition and fundraising.

ADVERTISING

If your station budget permits, consider advertising as a way to attract recruits, raise funds, promote special events, or raise awareness. Often local newspapers will have special rates or partnership programs for community charities such as yours.

LOGOS

If you need the official RCM-SAR logo, please contact the RCM-SAR Operations Assistant at 1 800 665-4757.



**ROYAL CANADIAN MARINE
SEARCH & RESCUE**
Saving Lives on the Water



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CONTACT INFORMATION:

Director of Marketing and Communications

– 1 800 665-4757 Ext 2 or 778 352-1006 (24 hour media line)

Operations Assistant

1 800 665-4757 Ext 1

Director of Training and Operations

1 800 665-4757 Ext 5

Links:

RCM-SAR web site:

www.rcmsar.com

Facebook:

www.facebook.com/rcmsar

Twitter:

www.twitter.com/RCM_SAR

BACKGROUNDER

Attached is a general backgrounder about RCM-SAR which you can use as a media handout.



Backgrounder

ROYAL CANADIAN MARINE SEARCH AND RESCUE

- Royal Canadian Marine Search and Rescue is a key part of the marine rescue system on the West Coast.
- We handle an average of about 800 missions a year. That is about a third of all marine emergencies in B.C.
- We are a volunteer organization. We have about 1,200 members. They and their families make a tremendous contribution to public safety. Our crews are ready to be called out at any time of day or night, in any kind of weather.
- We have rescue stations in more than 40 communities on the west coast and in the B.C. interior.
- When a marine emergency occurs, we are tasked by the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre in Victoria, operated by the Canadian Forces and Canadian Coast Guard.
- We respond to a wide range of missions, including medical emergencies, vessels caught in storms, boats that break down or are taking on water, people lost in fog or darkness, paddlers caught in currents, and people missing along the shore.
- We have a fleet of more than 70 vessels, including rescue craft designed especially for RCM-SAR and the demands of our coverage area. Our boats are equipped with electronic navigation and communications equipment, lifesaving and first aid gear, and in some cases specialized equipment such as infrared cameras and radio direction finders.
- We train hard. Collectively our crews log a total of more than 8,000 hours per year.
- Construction is underway for our new training facility near Victoria. It will be the centre of training for our volunteers throughout the province, and the new home for the RCM-SAR Fast Rescue Craft Simulator.
- The Fast Rescue Craft Simulator is a great training tool. Instructors create fog, darkness, bad weather, vessel traffic, equipment failure and other hazards to train and test our crews in a safe environment.
- We want to prevent tragedies on the water. We promote boating safety with public education programs, free recreational boater safety checks, pleasure craft operator certification, and loaner lifejackets for kids.
- We were formerly known as the Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary – Pacific. In 2012 we received permission from the Queen to use the title Royal in recognition of our long-standing service, broad geographic coverage and philanthropic mandate.
- We rely on community and corporate support for funding to keep our boats ready and our crews equipped.
- To read more about RCM-SAR or to support us with a donation, go to www.rcmsar.com

Contact:

24 hour media line 778 352-1006

media@rcmsar.com