



Society of Environmental Journalists

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April 10, 2009
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The Honourable Jim Prentice
Minister of the Environment
Les Terrasses de la Chaudière
10 Wellington Street, 28th Floor
Gatineau, Quebec
K1A 0H3

Honourable Mr. Prentice:

Over the past year, our organizations and individual Canadian members, as well as other professional associations and their representatives, expressed to your predecessor, the Hon. John Baird, our desire to raise public awareness of scientists' important contributions in Environment Canada.

One of our responsibilities is to address freedom of information, right-to-know, and other news-gathering issues of concern to journalists reporting on environmental, scientific and health topics.

We are disappointed because we received no response from your predecessor to any of our correspondence on the issue of Environment Canada's communications protocol. Established in the autumn of 2007, the protocol prevents government scientists from answering media questions directly and from providing other information in a manner that had been considered routine.

We ask that you reverse the Environment Canada communications policy change, because it is hindering journalists' efforts to adequately cover environmental issues and the ability of Environment Canada scientists to disseminate critical information in a timely fashion. For example, an SEJ member attending a conference recently hosted by Environment Canada was forbidden by the assigned press officer to interview scientists after they had given their public presentations.

The new policy shows a lack of commitment to government transparency and obstructs the public's access to information. The public pays the salaries and funds the research at Environment Canada. Some 60 percent of the department's workforce and 80 percent of its budget are devoted to science and technology. Our job is to opportunely distribute information and analysis to the public and decision makers. Restricting scientists' freedom to converse with media representatives undermines our professional efforts.

Improving the Quality, Accuracy and Visibility of Environmental Reporting



Thank you very much for your attention. We look forward to your prompt response in the interest of heightening comprehension of your department's very important work.

Sincerely,

Christy George, President, and Peter Fairley, SEJ Board member, Victoria, BC
Society of Environmental Journalists
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The Society of Environmental Journalists is the world's largest and oldest organization of individual working journalists covering environmental issues. Founded in 1990, we have a membership of more than 1,500 journalists, educators and students in Canada, the United States and 24 other countries, who are dedicated to improving the quality, accuracy and visibility of environmental reporting.

Mary Agnes Welch, President
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The CAJ promotes excellence in journalism, encouraging investigative journalism. We serve as the national voice of Canadian journalists, and we uphold the public's right to know.

Tim Lougheed, President
Canadian Science Writers' Association
1-800-796-8595
<http://www.sciencewriters.ca/>
president@sciencewriters.ca or try him at:
stormchild@sympatico.ca
The Canadian Science Writers' Association is Canada's national alliance of professional science communicators.

Anne Game, Executive Director
Canadian Journalists for Free Expression
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The CJFE is a Canadian non-governmental organization supported by Canadian journalists and advocates of free expression. CJFE boldly champions the free expression rights of journalists and media workers around the world. In Canada, we monitor, defend and promote free expression and access to information. We encourage and support individuals and groups to be vigilant in the protection of their own and others' free expression rights. We are active participants and builders of the global free expression community.

Tanya Gulliver, President
Professional Writers Association of Canada
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(416) 504-1645
<http://www.pwac.ca/>

The Professional Writers Association of Canada, reflecting the broader professional interests of approximately 600 members across the country. One of PWAC's key mandates is to lobby for freedom of the press and freedom of expression in Canada.

In the U.S.:

Mariette DiChristina Gerosa, President
National Association of Science Writers
<http://www.sciencewriters.ca/>
mdichristina@sciam.com

The largest organization devoted to the professional interests of science writers, the National Association of Science Writers fosters "the dissemination of accurate information regarding science through all media normally devoted to informing the public." Its 2,700 members include science writers and editors, and science-writing educators and students.

Len Bruzzese, Executive Director
Association of Health Care Journalists
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The Association of Health Care Journalists is an independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing public understanding of health care issues. Its mission is to improve the quality, accuracy and visibility of health care reporting, writing and editing. There are more than 1,000 members of AHCJ.

Marsha Shuler, President
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National Federation of Press Women is a dynamic nationwide organization of professional women — and men — pursuing careers across the communications spectrum. We are committed to the highest ethical standards in communications ... protecting First Amendment rights ... professional growth ... the next generation ... and networking with each other.

Radio & TV News Directors Association has decided to send a letter of its own on this subject.