

<b>COMMUNICATIONS &amp; LEGISLATIVE POLICY-PROCEDURE</b>	
<b>- Effective</b>	October 1, 2008
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Purpose</b>	To provide guidelines regarding electronic, written and verbal communications to the media, public, and elected officials.
 <b>Authority</b>	ORC 1501.01
 <b>Reference</b>	ODNR Lobbying Policy-Procedure
 <b>Resource</b>	Office of Communications Chief or Public Information Officer

## Media Relations

### Overview

Providing information to individual citizens, constituent groups and the media is an important responsibility for many ODNR employees. Because an employee's communication in his/her official position is perceived to be speaking on behalf of the entire Department (and, by extension, for all state government), it is important that judgment and care be exercised at all times.

### Policy

It is the policy of this Department that employees in a position to speak on behalf of his/her division and ODNR should feel free to provide factual, timely information about programs, events and activities for which the employee has **direct involvement, knowledge and responsibility**. Comments, however, should accurately reflect agency policies and positions, not personal opinions when an employee is speaking on behalf of the agency. Employees should not speculate on topics outside their area of expertise. Instead, matters falling outside his/her direct involvement, knowledge and responsibility should either be referred to the appropriate individual within the agency or the Office of Communications.

To ensure departmental communications are properly coordinated, employees should immediately report all media calls to the Office of Communications or to an appointed Division

Communications Contact (see attached list of contacts). Whenever possible, employees should contact their DCC or the Office of Communications before being interviewed by a reporter. In the event that this is not possible, employees should contact their DCC or the Office of Communications immediately following the interview. Employees should return media calls the same day, unless the reporter indicates he/she has a different deadline. Employees who are not able to return a media call within the reporter's deadline should seek assistance from the Office of Communications.

All requests for in-person and on-camera media interviews (interviews not conducted by phone) should be coordinated through the DCC or the Office of Communications. Employees who are in the field or at public meetings may give in-person and on-camera interviews if they are directly involved in the subject without consulting their DCC or the Office of Communications first. However, their DCC or the Office of Communications should be notified following the interview.

All letters to editors and reporters must be approved and issued by the Office of Communications. If an employee believes a story or editorial was in serious error, he/she should contact the Office of Communications as soon as possible.

All written communications to the media and press releases (in particular: matters of policy, legislation, personnel actions or official investigations) must be coordinated through the Office of Communications. Exceptions may be made for releases on routine or local matters (special events, open houses, advisories, etc.) issued to the media by district offices and individual field locations or those that have been pre-approved by the Office of Communications. Such routine or local news releases should also be copied for informational purposes to the Office of Communications.

## **Web site**

### **Overview**

In response to user needs, ODNR's Web site presence has grown rapidly over the last several years, with more than 1 million viewers each month. However, the decentralized development of Web pages has resulted in inconsistent branding, navigation and visual design practices.

With the increasing use of the Web to communicate information and provide services to the public, it is imperative that ODNR's Web site reflects good visual design and usability and that all future developments are guided by policy and procedures that optimize the user's experience.

### **Policy**

The Office of Communications can make or request changes to text, style, layout or colors in order to ensure a common overall appearance to information provided by the department. Web pages shall follow the state's OIT Web Standardization Policy (State of Ohio IT Policy ITP F-4) and any other department-wide guidelines established by the Office of Communications. The Office of Communications and Office of Information Technology will oversee and coordinate the implementation of the OIT Web Standardization Policy and work with ODNR divisions and the Governor's Office to ensure that the ODNR site complies with all state standards. Exceptions to the policy will require written approval by the Chief of the Office of Communications.

All ODNR Web sites and related sub-sites will reside on department servers maintained by the Office of Information Technology (OIT); hosted sites are permitted with written permission from the director or his designee. Domain names must be acquired or renewed through the ODNR Domain Name Policy.

Each Division and Office will meet with the Office of Communications annually to review their Web pages, ensure effectiveness and cohesiveness, target appropriate audiences and plan for new content and technologies.

## **Public/Elected Officials**

### **Overview**

Public officials, particularly those in the state General Assembly, often seek out ODNR's expertise opinion but do not always start with a similar point of contact at the agency. Often these officials are looking to find answers to constituent problems or determine which policy direction they want to go on any given issue.

Given the different perspectives that these public officials have on ODNR's work, it is important to establish a uniform legislative contact procedure to assist and support all DNR employees in the planning and coordination of efforts with our partners in the General Assembly and Congress.

### **Policy**

#### **A. Contacts to federal or state legislators and their staff**

1. **General Communication** - Any ODNR employee will contact the Legislative Liaison or Assistant Liaison by phone, e-mail, or contact sheet **prior** to any planned legislative contact. All written communication to legislators must be approved by your Deputy Director and the Legislative Liaison or Assistant Liaison **prior** to being sent. A copy will be filed with the Legislative Liaison. Unscheduled contact should be reported as soon as possible.
2. **Legislative Initiatives** - The need for a new legislative initiative should be brought forward by the Division Chief to the Deputy Director, who will be responsible for contacting the Legislative Liaison unless otherwise instructed. All questions regarding pending legislation shall be referred to and coordinated by the Legislative Liaison.
3. **Lobbying** - Lobbying is defined as: "Actively advocating" which means to promote, advocate, or oppose the passage, modification, defeat, or executive approval or veto of any legislation by direct communication with any member of the General Assembly, any member of the Controlling Board, the Governor, the director of any department, or any member of the staff or employee of any public office.

Do not initiate any lobbying effort on any matter pertaining to the Department of Natural Resources. It is the responsibility of the Deputy Directors and the Legislative Liaison to

discuss your proposal first with the ODNR Management Team before responding, to assure a coordinated departmental approach.

For the purposes of lobbying federal and state legislators, the following positions will be registered with the Joint Legislative Ethics Committee (JLEC). Any ODNR lobbying effort must directly involve and/or be carried out by the employees holding these positions:

- a. Director
- b. Assistant Director
- c. Deputy Director
- d. Legislative Liaison
- e. Assistant Legislative Liaison

**B. Legislative contacts from federal or state legislators and their staff**

Contact initiated by legislators or their staff to any ODNR employee will be responded to by that employee in a straightforward and technical manner. A legislative contact sheet will then be forwarded to the Legislative Liaison as soon as possible. Responses should include technical information and facts only. Any request regarding new or pending legislation or new policy proposals should be referred to the Deputy Director or Legislative Liaison.

Requests for positions on pending legislation will be discussed with and/or provided by an agent of the Department who is registered with JLEC and will not be given by ODNR staff without the prior consent of a registered agent.