



Australian Parachute Federation Ltd

# INCIDENT COMMUNICATIONS GUIDE



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**STATUS: EDUCATIONAL**

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Alternatively, contact the APF Office for a paper copy at a cost of \$5.00





**Warning**

Parachuting and flying in parachuting aircraft can be dangerous.

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## About This Publication

This guide is offered free to APF members. It is produced by the Australian Parachute Federation Incorporated (APF) for the information of APF members. If you want more information or copies of this guide for yourself or drop zone staff, please ask the instructional staff at your DZ or contact the APF Office.

## Version Control

It is important that members refer to the current version of this guide. This guide is current only at the time of printing by the APF Office. This version was published on 11 April 2019.

Current versions of APF manuals, guides, the Operational Regulations, Regulatory Schedules and associated forms can be found on the [APF website](#).

## Disclaimer

This guide has been produced for the information and assistance of APF members. The information it contains is based on the opinions of the writers: it does not necessarily represent APF policy. While the writers have attempted to ensure that the information in this guide is correct, it may contain information which is out of date or incorrect.

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## Credits

This guide was originally developed in conjunction with Ruby Communications.

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## **PART 1 - WHY WE NEED THIS PLAN**

As the peak body that controls skydiving and parachuting at most civilian operations in Australia, the Australian Parachute Federation (APF) is committed to the safety and wellbeing of its members and participants. Nearly 200,000 people tandem skydive across the country each year, along with the thousands of enthusiasts and competitors who pursue the sport on a regular basis.

While Australia's skydiving community is renowned for having one of the best safety records in the world, incidents will sometimes occur that attract public and media attention. Depending on the scale of these events, that attention may be intense and require a precise and strong communications response.

This Incident Communications Plan provides APF and its members with information and resources to help them negotiate incidents from a media perspective both immediately and in the longer term. The ability to successfully manage the media attention that accompanies even minor incidents is in the best interests of maintaining the reputation of individual businesses and the wider skydiving industry.

Meticulous preparation is a fundamental of skydiving and it is no different when dealing with the demands of the media during an incident, disaster or crisis.

## **PART 2 - WHAT IS AN INCIDENT?**

The APF and its members will often have contrasting views with the media when it comes to what defines an incident. While events such as those that involve a fatality are undoubtedly newsworthy, the skydiving fraternity has previously found itself bemused and/or frustrated by the amount of attention the media has placed on seemingly routine incidents.

For the purposes of this Incident Communications Plan:

***An incident is any event that is worthy of media attention or has the potential to prompt the media to approach the APF or its members for comment or information.***

## **PART 3 - SCALE OF INCIDENTS**

The recommended communications response to an incident, including timeliness and escalation, depends on various factors such as the scale of the event and level of media interest it inspires. This plan will outline various approaches to dealing with an incident, with the following Scale of Incidents used as a guide:

1. Catastrophic Incident (eg: aircraft crash with multiple deaths, student or spectator death)
2. Serious Incident (eg: fatalities or serious casualties including experienced skydivers)
3. Minor Incident (eg: near misses such as engine failure; close calls resulting in no injuries; minor injuries such as broken ankles)

## **PART 4 - UNDERSTANDING THE MEDIA**

Media outlets have many motives when choosing what stories they will share with their audiences. While some are crucial to a healthy society (eg: a desire to inform or educate the public), it is also the case that in a competitive commercial environment, the need to entertain – or “attract eyeballs” - is a key motive.

It is for this reason that skydiving ‘incidents’ regularly attract the attention of journalists, even those events that seem run-of-the-mill to experienced participants. While the APF and its members often feel frustrated by the sometimes ‘sensationalist’ coverage of such incidents, it is important to remember the media is merely aiming to provide the wider public with the dramatic storylines so many people crave.

Our focus in such circumstances should be to control what we can. The media has every right to make enquiries and report what they consider to be news, but we also have the right – and indeed the responsibility – to choose how we respond to their requests for comment or information.

Part of the challenge when doing this is the time pressure and competitive tensions the media faces when reporting a story. The rush to be ‘first’ with the news or provide details that other outlets do not have, can create an intense situation for both them and the people they are reporting on.

As gatekeepers of both information and commentary, it is our role to balance the wants of the media with the needs of our own organisations and, most importantly, the privacy and emotions of the people most impacted by such events.

## **PART 5 - THE KEY RULES**

Regardless of whether an incident is Catastrophic, Serious or Minor, there are several rules all APF employees, members and staff should follow when dealing with media. It may be advantageous to clarify legal rights here (eg asking media to leave private property/scene, does media need authorisation (consent) to get comments, take photos etc).

- Do not provide comment or information about an incident unless you are permitted by an APF representative or Club Directors to do so. To avoid misinformation or unnecessary commentary, designated APF staff and Chief Instructors are best placed to be official spokespeople.
- If approached by media, you have the right not to comment. Be aware that journalists can use extended declinations as quotes in their stories (eg: “I don’t want to comment because I saw the body after the accident and it’s just traumatic to talk”).
- Do not say “No comment” as journalists can use this as the basis to report that the APF or member organisations ‘refused to comment’. It is best to politely advise them to contact your manager or the APF.
- Do not release the names or details of people involved in an incident. Our focus should always be on the wellbeing of victims and their families, which extends to respecting their privacy, and the police are responsible for managing the release of such information.
- Do not post commentary or details about an incident on social media (business or private). The media is legally allowed to use information posted on social media, including photos and videos,

even when on personal pages. As anyone who can view your page/post can share that information with the media, it is best to consider anything you post on social media as public comment.

- Do not provide media outlets with footage of an incident unless you are authorised by an APF representative to do so. In Catastrophic or Serious Incidents, this can be a legal concern given such material will likely be used as evidence in police and coronial investigations. In Minor Incidents, the release of such footage can lead to increased and often sensationalist coverage of an event the skydiving community would consider standard (eg: use of reserve parachute after a main parachute malfunction). Be aware on-the-scene media may offer \$\$'s in exchange for copies of footage

## **PART 6 - MANAGING AN INCIDENT**

The following guidelines are designed to provide the APF and its member organisations with a checklist of key factors to consider when dealing with an incident. No two incidents are the same so the ability to adapt and be flexible is crucial. That said, the combination of 'The Key Rules' and these recommendations will greatly assist with navigating an incident.

### **6.1 Working with Families**

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Keeping a victim's loved ones informed about a situation is an essential part of crisis communications and should be viewed as a priority. **Family members should ALWAYS be updated before the media or stakeholders.** We will work with the media, but they will not dictate what we do and the timeframe in which we do it. Be aware of media "acting" as a family member.

- Establish an area for family and friends to gather. The location should be away from the site and media, easily accessible and as comfortable as possible.
- Coordinate with local organisations to assist with counselling.
- Appoint a team member to coordinate communication and responses with the group. Work with police to coordinate family communication. Establish protocols for sending updates to family liaison and authenticating updates.
- When communicating with family members or loved ones, always:
  - Ensure information is accurate.
  - Provide updates to family members before making announcements to the media.
  - Be prepared to handle/answer difficult questions regarding who was at fault/who is to blame, compensation, lawsuits, timelines, etc. Anticipate these questions and develop messages in advance.

### **6.2 Catastrophic Incidents**

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#### **6.2.1 Immediate Priorities**

- Verify and assess the incident. Access to reliable information is crucial in the early stages of a crisis. Determine what has happened and who needs to be contacted.

- Assign a senior staff member (eg: Chief Instructor/DZSO if CI not present) to lead the response. While they can delegate duties, it is crucial that one authoritative voice is responsible for overseeing key aspects of the response.
- Establish a parameter around the incident site. The media will often quickly descend on a Catastrophic or Serious Incident and every effort should be made to ensure they are kept at a safe and respectable distance from unfolding events. Consider their legal rights (eg if accident in public place vs on private land – how can you restrict media?)
- Ensure that staff and others impacted by the incident (eg: family members, witnesses) are cared for and not ‘swamped’ by media. Establish a safe place for them to gather.
- Alert the APF as soon as possible. The organisation will assign someone to lend support/advice and commence efforts to have senior personnel on-site. Depending on the location, this could take hours, but ongoing contact will continue during this period.
- If you are unable to immediately reach the APF, contact Ruby Communications on 07 3216 0400 or email [media@apf.com.au](mailto:media@apf.com.au) and its specialist staff will assist.

When appropriate, reinforce to staff and other team members that the Response Lead (eg: Chief Instructor/DZSO) is the only person authorised to address media or provide public comment about the incident. ‘The Key Rules’ should also be reinforced, possibly via printed/emailed copies (see Appendix F).

### **6.2.2 Media Management**

- Nominate a team member to manage the on-site media presence. It is preferable that this is not the Chief Instructor/Spokesperson but rather someone who can act as a liaison with journalists attending the scene.
- Establish an area for the media to base themselves away from the incident location. This step needs to be done quickly as once they have claimed a site, it can be difficult to move them.
- Ensure that whoever is responsible for managing incoming phone calls/emails is prepared for dealing with media enquiries. They should be polite but firm about the fact they are unable to comment and will pass any enquiries to the relevant person. See Appendix A for a guide on how to handle such calls.
- Nominate an authorised media spokesperson (eg: Chief Instructor). In consultation with the APF, they will be responsible for any official release of information or public comment on the incident. The APF will provide support/comment remotely and share these duties once it has a presence on-site.
- Establish a location for a Communications Operations Centre. A Catastrophic Incident will typically require an ongoing commitment and it will be beneficial to have a base that allows team members to not only meet but have access to resources such as computers and printers.
- If in any doubt about how to handle a media enquiry or the situation is overwhelming, Ruby Communications is available to lend support on 07 3216 0400 or email [media@apf.com.au](mailto:media@apf.com.au)



### 6.2.3 Messaging

- Any public comment or release of information about an incident needs to be handled with care. Only approved spokespeople (eg: Chief Instructor) should be quoted or release details about an incident.
- The media will often be alerted to an incident before all the facts can be determined. It is important to work with the APF and other authorities to ensure that any release of information to the media is appropriate before doing so.
- A brief statement or comment in the early stages of an incident can often appease the media's initial demands. Work with the APF to craft a media statement that expresses empathy for those impacted acknowledges the incident is under investigation and more information will be provided as it comes to hand. See Appendix B and Appendix C for draft media statements.
- Any messages that will be distributed internally and externally on behalf of the APF must be approved by the following individuals:
  1. APF Chief Executive Officer
  2. APF Legal Counsel/Advisor
  3. Ruby Communications
- Any messages that will be distributed on behalf of a Club should be approved by the following individuals:
  1. Club Director
  2. Chief Instructor
- If such a statement is being read aloud for the benefit of TV cameras, clearly state before commencing that the spokesperson will not be taking questions.
- Police are responsible for notifying the next of kin of people involved in a Catastrophic or Serious Incident and revealing their names and identities to media at an appropriate time.
- To appease the media, it is possible to reveal the most generic of descriptions about those involved in an incident (eg: a European male aged in his 40s). It is critical that the language used will not allow specific individuals to be identified.
- As an incident evolves, it may be necessary to provide further updates/statements to media. Short and succinct is the best way of communicating (eg: establish three key points) and referencing the industry's adherence to CASA and ATSB guidelines will help establish credibility. Where possible, police should be consulted about what news they believe is suitable to be shared.
- Avoid exclusive interviews that favour specific media outlets. Journalists are extremely competitive and should be given information equally.
- Provide information in a timely manner. This can prevent information vacuums where speculation and rumour can grow and have a serious impact on the situation.

### 6.3 Serious Incidents

The major difference between Catastrophic and Serious incidents will typically be the intensity and duration of media interest. These factors may also impact how much the APF is involved in decision-making and providing guidance and support.

For example, an aircraft crashing into a childcare centre with several first-time skydivers aboard would likely result in multiple local, national and even international media outlets rushing to the scene and setting up camp for several days of media conferences, journalistic 'investigations' and live TV broadcasts. The APF would immediately organise key staff members to travel to the site to help manage the crisis and provide the victims' loved ones, its member organisation and their staff with ongoing support.

Alternatively, a serious injury to a tandem skydiver in a smaller regional centre may result in only couple of outlets attending the scene and phone enquiries from further afield. The general approach for managing the incident would remain the same (ie: respect for privacy, working with police) but there may be less need for other procedures (eg: having an APF presence on-site).

***The communications response for Serious Incidents should adopt the Catastrophic Incident approach (Section 6.2), with specific actions and the level of resources determined by the gravity of the situation and level of media interest.***

Key points to remember include:

- Assign a senior staff member (eg: Chief Instructor) to lead the response and be the authorised media spokesperson.
- Alert the APF as soon as possible. If you are unable to reach the APF, contact Ruby Communications on 07 3216 0400 or email [media@apf.com.au](mailto:media@apf.com.au) and its specialist staff will assist.
- Provide staff and other team members with 'The Key Rules' (Appendix F) and reinforce that only an authorised spokesperson should provide public comment about the incident.
- Ensure that whoever is responsible for managing incoming phone calls/emails is prepared for dealing with media enquiries (Appendix A).

Police are responsible for notifying next of kin and revealing victims' names and identities to media.

### 6.4 Minor Incidents

Journalists sometimes request the APF and its members to comment on or provide details about incidents that do not seem worthy of media attention.

The high-risk nature of skydiving means an event that may seem standard to experienced participants (eg: use of reserve parachute) is the stuff of drama for the media and public. Other examples include minor in-air close-calls or minor impact injuries such as broken ankles.

The fact the media often finds out about such minor incidents from third parties can also result in embellished or incorrect accounts. As guardians of skydiving in Australia, the APF and its members should aim to minimise or negate coverage associated with such incidents. Tips for doing so include:

- Never confirm or comment on an incident until senior staff (eg: Chief Instructor) have been consulted. Politely take the journalist's contact details and say someone will return their call.
- Speak with key participants to gain a clear understanding of what the incident involved.
- Remind staff that only authorised spokespeople (eg: Chief Instructor) can comment to the media about the incident. If appropriate, share 'The Key Rules' with them (Appendix F).
- If the incident is deemed unworthy of media comment, politely discuss the situation with the journalist in a bid to deter them from reporting on the situation.
- If the incident justifies comment or the journalist says they will run the story regardless, consider drafting a succinct statement. This may be a chance to reinforce Australian skydiving's world-class safety record and that such an incident showcases the skills and training of its participants.
- Contact the APF for advice or guidance as needed (Section 8.0). If a story is expected to run, it would also be beneficial to inform the APF as a matter of course.

## **PART 7 - SOCIAL MEDIA**

The advent of social media has added another complex layer to dealing with an incident from a communications perspective. As well as being a source of material for journalists, it can allow organisations such as the APF and its members to share their own messages with audiences.

As stated in Section 5, the media is legally allowed to use information sourced from social media, including photos and videos, so it is essential to consider any material posted as public comment. This extends to personal pages, hence the need to remind staff and other skydiving custodians not to post commentary or details about incidents on social media.

When dealing with a Catastrophic or Serious Incident, it is worth considering:

- Ceasing all proactive messaging and promotion of skydiving on social media accounts.
- Assigning a team member to monitor the organisation's social media accounts for activity/comments that may require feedback, escalation or removal.
- In the event of fatalities or serious injuries, changing key imagery to reflect an empathetic tone as opposed to the 'thrill' of skydiving. Taking the time to prepare in advance for such a change is recommended.
- As appropriate, posting a message of sympathy for the victims and their loved ones.
- As appropriate, sharing prepared statements/updates about the incident.

When dealing with a Minor Incident that has received unjustified media coverage, there is also potential to use the organisation's social media platforms to clarify or correct the public record. However, remember that anything posted on social media can be used by journalists and this may merely add to the longevity of the 'story'. For guidance or advice, contact the APF (Appendix A).

## **PART 8 - KEY CONTACTS**

Australian Parachute Federation  
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Richard McCooey  
0419 002208

Australian Parachute Federation  
Safety & Training Manager  
Charl Rootman  
0457 299122

Ruby Communications  
Director Naomi Spies  
0415 177 617

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Media Enquiry Phone Script – Catastrophic or Serious Incident

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Thank you for your call.

We are aware of the incident and, as you'd appreciate, my managers are unable to speak to you at the moment. I will happily take your contact details and ensure that one of our team gets back to you as soon as possible. It would be great to get your email address as well as your phone number.

[IF JOURNALIST IS PERSISTENT] I'm sorry but I'm not the appropriate person to provide comment or details. I've been asked to pass your contact information on to my managers and they will be sure to update you.

[IF THEY CONTINUE TO PUSH] If you don't want to leave your contact details with me, you are welcome to contact our national body – the Australian Parachute Federation – on 07 3457 0100.

#### ENDS

NB: Be aware that some journalists may use parts of their phone call as quotes in their stories (eg: "I'm not the right person to comment but **I know everyone here is devastated about what has happened. It's so sad. We have lost one of our closest friends.** Of course I'll get someone to contact you.")

For this reason, it is best to stay as close as possible to the script. Simply ask to take their contact details and say that someone will be in touch. Do not say "No comment" as journalists can use this as the basis to report that the APF or member organisation 'refused to comment'.

## Appendix B: Draft Media Statement – Fatality

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### Media Statement

*Not to be released without approval of [INSERT NAME/TITLE]*

**DATE**

**Please attribute to: [INSERT SPOKESPERSON'S TITLE AND NAME]**

We are devastated to confirm that **XX** skydivers have been involved in a fatal accident at **LOCATION**.

The incident, which happened about **TIME DAY**, is being investigated and its exact causes are unknown at this stage.

Our thoughts are with the deceased's loved ones and we are committed to providing them with the support they need at this difficult time.

We are assisting police with the investigation into the accident including the knowledge and experience of our expert accident investigators.

It could take several days to identify the most likely cause of this tragic accident, but early investigations suggest **[INSERT DETAILS (IF POSSIBLE)]**.

The tightknit skydiving community is understandably shocked by this tragedy, particularly given more than 500,000 skydives are performed in Australia each year with very few serious incidents.

We thank everyone for their understanding and patience as investigations continue into the cause of this very sad and tragic event.

**ENDS**

## Appendix C: Draft Media Statement – Serious Injury

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### Media Statement

*Not to be released without approval of [INSERT NAME/TITLE]*

**DATE**

**Please attribute to:** INSERT SPOKESPERSON'S TITLE AND NAME

We can confirm that XX skydiver/s have been involved in an accident at LOCATION.

The incident, which happened about TIME DAY, is being investigated and its exact causes are unknown at this stage.

Our thoughts are with the injured skydiver/s and their loved ones and we are committed to providing them with the support they need at this difficult time.

It could take several days to identify the most likely cause of the accident but early investigations suggest INSERT DETAILS (IF POSSIBLE).

The skydiver has sustained [GENERAL DETAILS] injuries and is in a stable/critical condition.

**ENDS**

## Appendix D: Tips for Interacting with Media

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- Short deadlines - Journalists must meet tight deadlines and need follow-up information and updates in a timely manner. Reporters appreciate it if you ask when their deadline is, then meet it.
- Space limitations - Journalists can't always include the background information you provide so prefer succinct responses. Keep information to no more than three points. Broadcast journalists love concise sound bites.
- Responses – Be short, sharp and to the point without giving information away.

### Live Interviews (TV or Radio)

Before accepting, ask yourself:

- Am I the right person?
- Do I have the answers to the questions that will be asked?
- Is this interview required? Is this the right location?

### On-the-Spot or Impromptu Interviews

Before answering any questions, ask yourself:

- Am I the right person?
- Do I have the appropriate answers?
- Is this the right time or place?
- Is this better handled in a scheduled briefing or interview?
- Remember you have the right to decline. If so, be sure to explain politely why you are choosing not to respond. Avoid using the words “no comment”. Provide the time for the next media briefing if one is scheduled.

### Being at your Best for an Interview

#### Before the interview:

- Do your homework.
- Develop a set of messages that provide the information you want/need to convey.
- Develop a list of questions the media are likely to ask.
- Develop and practice key messages and responses to anticipated questions.
- Practice speaking without jargon or acronyms.
- Remember that everything you say can be reported.
- There is no such thing as “off the record” replies or commentary.

#### During an interview

- Direct the interview toward your three key messages.
- Stay “on message.”
- Be confident, but not arrogant.
- Listen carefully and repeat questions if necessary to clarify.
- Avoid hypothetical questions.
- Never lie or knowingly mislead.
- Correct any information errors upon realising they have been made.
- Never comment on issues outside your area of expertise.
- Never speculate on what has happened or could happen.
- Treat all questions seriously.
- Look at the interviewer rather than the camera or monitor.
- Keep calm, even if the interviewer becomes hostile.



## Appendix E: Media Frequently Asked Questions

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### THE INCIDENT

#### What happened here today?

- We can confirm that a skydiver(s) was involved in a <fatal> skydiving accident today. The exact causes are under investigation and are unknown at this stage. As more information comes to hand, we will let you know.
- Our expert accident investigators from the Australian Parachute Federation are assisting police with the investigation. We thank the police and paramedics who have been extremely supportive of all involved.
- Our thoughts are with the <deceased/injured's> family and friends. We thank everyone for their understanding and patience as investigations continue into the cause of this tragic event.

#### What was the cause of the accident?

Early indications show <insert information>. However, until a full investigation is completed, we are unable to accurately determine the cause of the accident.

#### What height did the <deceased/injured> jump from?

This was a jump from <insert> feet, which is standard.

#### Why did the main parachute fail? Why wasn't there a back-up parachute?

- Until a full investigation has been completed we are unable to determine why the main parachute failed.
- Industry regulations stipulate that a back-up parachute is to be worn for every jump within Australia.
- We are unsure at this stage why the back-up parachute was not deployed but will seek to determine this throughout the investigation.

#### Have the victim's loved ones and the organisation's staff been notified?

- There has been a preliminary internal briefing. However, the initial investigation is currently underway and further details of what has occurred remain unknown.  
We will be doing our best to ensure all available support is provided to the families, our staff and those involved at the scene.

### THE VICTIM

#### Tell us about the person who was <deceased/injured>?

It is the role of the police to formally identify the deceased. However, we are able to confirm a <age range> <insert sex> was involved in the incident.

#### What is the victim(s) name?

Out of respect for the <deceased/injured's> loved ones, we won't be releasing any further details about their identity at this stage.

#### Where did they live?

That is information for the police to release.

**Was the <deceased/injured> an experienced skydiver?**

The person in question was an <experienced/tandem> skydiver who had completed more than <insert number> jumps.

**Did any family members or friends witness the incident?**

- The exact details of the incident are under investigation and are unknown at this stage.
- Our sympathies go out to the families and friends of the deceased, as well as those in our skydiving community.
- We are also doing our best to ensure all available support is provided to families, our staff and those involved at the scene.

**Has the next of kin been notified?**

It is the role of the police to notify next of kin.

**THE SAFETY**

**What is the current procedure for safety checks for skydivers?**

- Experienced skydivers are trained to conduct regular safety checks of all their equipment to ensure they are in good working order at all times.
- APF regulations state a final safety check of all equipment must be conducted before the skydiver exits the aircraft. Experienced skydivers would usually conduct this self-check of their own equipment.
- This routine safety check includes appraisal of many different items, including helmet, goggles and parachute handles.
- The sport of skydiving is an outdoor adventure activity and while advancements in technology, training and safety have greatly increased the safety of the sport, we understand there are risks and unfortunately sometimes accidents do happen.
- The most recent studies by the International Parachuting Commission show Australia is ranked in the top two countries in the world in terms of safety.

**What happens to the first parachute in the event it malfunctions and has been deployed from the skydiver?**

If the first parachute has malfunctioned, the skydiver may need to detach this parachute so it may drift slowly to the ground while the second reserve parachute is deployed.

**How does APF regulate industry safety?**

The APF is proud to maintain some of the highest industry and safety standards in the world, with a stringent and clearly defined qualification structure and a commitment to safety and skills progression.

**How many deaths occur on average in Australia each year?**

- Despite a huge influx in jumps, the figure has slowly diminished to a long-term average of two fatalities per year and is decreasing further with advancements in safety, training and technology.
- However, one fatality a year is one too many and we are striving to drive this down to zero.

**How many people skydive every year in Australia?**

About half a million skydives are completed safely in Australia each year.

**What is the focus on safety of the APF?**

- Safety is at the forefront of everything we do.
- As an example, APF regulations state an annual audit of every training organisation in Australia, no matter how small, must be conducted.
- The audit is a detailed investigation of every aspect of the operation including 50 different checkpoints and is undertaken by an independent and highly qualified lead auditor.
- Additional audits may be undertaken if any concerns are identified at the discretion of the APF and annual audits of 60 training organisations in Australia are currently conducted.

## Appendix F: The Key Rules – one-page shareable format

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- Do not provide comment or information about an incident unless you are permitted to do so. To avoid misinformation or unnecessary commentary, designated staff and members such as Chief Instructors are best placed to be official spokespeople.
- If approached by media, you have the right not to comment. Be aware that journalists can use extended declinations as quotes in their stories (eg: “I don’t want to comment because I saw the body after the accident and it’s just traumatic to talk”).
- Do not say “No comment” as journalists can use this as the basis to report that the APF or member organisation ‘refused to comment’. It is best to politely advise them to contact your manager or the APF.
- Do not release the names or details of people involved in an incident. Our focus should always be on the wellbeing of victims and their families, which extends to respecting their privacy. The police are responsible for managing the release of such information.
- Do not post commentary or details about an incident on social media (business or private). The media is legally allowed to use information posted on social media, including photos and videos, even when on personal pages. As anyone who can view your page/post can share that information with the media, it is best to consider anything you post on social media as public comment.
- Do not provide media outlets with footage of an incident unless you are permitted to do so. In Catastrophic or Serious Incidents, this can be a legal concern given such material will likely be used as evidence in potential police and coronial investigations. In Minor Incidents, the release of such footage can lead to increased and often sensationalist coverage of an event the skydiving community would consider routine (eg: use of reserve parachute after a main parachute malfunction)

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## AUSTRALIAN PARACHUTE FEDERATION

### Incident Communications Guide – Summary

**CONTACT** - in the event of an incident, alert the APF as soon as possible.

- Head Office - 07 3457 0100
- Richard McCooey (Chief Executive Officer) - 0419 002 208
- Charl Rootman (Safety & Training Manager) - 0457 299 122

If you are unable to reach the APF, contact Ruby Communications on 07 3216 0400 or email [media@apf.com.au](mailto:media@apf.com.au) and its specialist staff will assist.

#### **MEDIA SPOKESPEOPLE**

Only authorised spokespersons are permitted to address media or provide public comment about an incident. A club should nominate a media spokesperson with options including:

- Chief Instructor / DZSO / Club Director

Any messages to be distributed on behalf of a Club should be approved by a Club Director and the Chief Instructor.

Any messages to be distributed internally and externally on behalf of the APF must be approved by the APF Chief Executive Officer, APF Legal Counsel/Advisor and Ruby Communications.

#### **MANAGING THE SITE**

- Assign a senior staff member (Chief Instructor/DZSO if CI not present) to lead the response.
- Establish a perimeter around the incident site.
- Establish an area for the media to base themselves away from the incident location.
- Ensure staff and others impacted by the incident (eg: family members, witnesses) are cared for and not 'swamped' by media. Establish a safe place for them to gather.
- Establish a location for a Communications Operations Centre, particularly in a Catastrophic Incident where it will be beneficial to have a base that allows team members to not only meet but have access to resources such as computers and printers.

#### **VICTIM'S FAMILY AND STAFF**

The wellbeing of a victim's loved ones and our colleagues should always be our first priority. Every effort should be made to ensure they are cared for and kept informed as much as possible. **Family members should ALWAYS be updated before the media or stakeholders.** Other tips include:

- Establish an area for family and friends to gather. The location should be away from the site and media, easily accessible and as comfortable as possible.
- Coordinate with local organisations to assist with counselling.
- Appoint a team member to coordinate communication and responses with the group. Work with police to coordinate family communication. Establish protocols for sending updates to family liaison and authenticating updates. This is always to be the police where possible.
- When communicating with family members or loved ones, always:
  - Ensure information is accurate.
  - Provide updates to family members before making announcements to the media.
  - Be prepared to handle/answer difficult questions regarding who was at fault/who is to blame, compensation, lawsuits, timelines, etc. Anticipate these questions and develop messages in advance.

## **MEDIA HOLDING STATEMENT**

A brief statement or comment in the early stages of an incident can often appease the media's initial demands. The examples below (fatality; serious injury) could be adapted as necessary.

### **Media Statement**

*Not to be released without approval of [INSERT NAME/TITLE]*

**Please attribute to:** [INSERT SPOKESPERSON'S TITLE AND NAME]

We are devastated to confirm that **XX** skydivers have been involved in a fatal accident at **LOCATION**.

The incident, which happened about **TIME DAY**, is being investigated and its exact causes are unknown at this stage.

Our thoughts are with the deceased's loved ones and we are committed to providing them with the support they need at this difficult time.

We are assisting police with the investigation into the accident including the knowledge and experience of our expert accident investigators.

It could take several days to identify the most likely cause of this accident, but early investigations suggest **INSERT DETAILS (IF POSSIBLE)**.

The tightknit skydiving community is understandably shocked by this tragedy, particularly given more than 500,000 skydives are performed in Australia each year with very few serious incidents.

We thank everyone for their understanding and patience as investigations continue into the cause of this very sad and tragic event.

**ENDS**

### **Media Statement**

*Not to be released without approval of [INSERT NAME/TITLE]*

**Please attribute to:** [INSERT SPOKESPERSON'S TITLE AND NAME]

We can confirm that **XX** skydiver/s have been involved in an accident at **LOCATION**.

The incident, which happened about **TIME DAY**, is being investigated and its exact causes are unknown at this stage.

Our thoughts are with the injured skydiver/s and their loved ones and we are committed to providing them with the support they need at this difficult time.

It could take several days to identify the most likely cause of the accident but early investigations suggest **INSERT DETAILS (IF POSSIBLE)**.

The skydiver has sustained **[GENERAL DETAILS]** injuries and is in a **stable/critical** condition.

**ENDS**