
APPENDIX

CBSC Decision 05/06-1641 CFTO-TV (CTV Toronto) re CTV News report (terrorist suspects)

The Complaint

The CBSC received the following complaint on June 3, 2006 via its website form:

station: CFTO (channel 9)

program: *CFTO News* (Channel 9)

date: June 3rd, 2006

time: 6:00pm

concern: At approximately 6:10 pm, I noticed that this news station displayed the names and full addresses of the individuals involved in the "terror" raids by the RCMP and CSIS. I believe that practice of displaying the full names and addresses of suspected individuals is contrary to media ethics and provincial and federal privacy legislation. I understand the need to display the name and city of the accused; however displaying the specific addresses of these individuals is entirely inappropriate. In previous broadcasts involving rapists, child molesters [*sic*] and pedophiles etc., I don't believe the personal information, such as home address, was displayed in that fashion. I immediately called the station to complain, however they dismissed my concerns. These suspected individuals have only been charged and not convicted, and are still awaiting their day in court. I believe that CFTO acted in an irresponsible manner by displaying that personal information.

The complainant sent additional information on June 4:

Dear CBSC,

I just wanted to add something to my initial complaint using the Complaint Form on your website regarding the June 3rd, 2006, 6:00 pm news broadcast of CFTO-TV. I wanted to add that Article 4 of the *RTNDA Code of Ethics* should apply to this case. I felt that the display of the full home addresses of the accused individuals was unreasonable because it infringed on their privacy. I would agree that displaying the name and city of the individuals is reasonable for public interest, however, the display of the entire home address of all these individuals was irresponsible and held no public value except to create fear and paranoia among local residents. Not to mention the possible public safety threat from individuals who might threaten or harm the residents of those homes. Clearly I believe that the display of the personal home addresses of these individuals on the CFTO news broadcast was unreasonable, unprofessional and violated Article 4 of the *RTNDA Code of Ethics*.

Broadcaster's Response

CTV Toronto responded to the complainant on July 7:

The Canadian Broadcast Standards Council has forwarded your letter regarding a CTV Toronto newscast on June 3rd, 2006. You raise a number of concerns in your letter, and I am pleased to respond and explain our reasons for publishing the addresses of the men accused of plotting a terrorist attack.

The charges against the accused [*sic*] are extremely serious, and while those under arrest have yet to have their day in court, it is CTV's position that the public has the right to know certain information, including where the accused [*sic*] lived. The information about the addresses, which is available in telephone directories and the internet, aired only on June 3rd, three days prior to the first court appearance on Tuesday June 6th, when a publication ban was imposed on evidence in the case.

Broadcasting the addresses of the terrorism suspects did not contravene any laws concerning privacy, but our editorial staff did consider the journalistic and ethical issues before airing the information. CTV News adheres to the *RTNDA's Code of Ethics*. Article Four of the Code, concerning Privacy, states that broadcasters will "make every effort to ensure that newsgathering and reporting does not unreasonably infringe privacy, except when necessary in the public interest." In the opinion of senior staff, the addresses of the accused men were in the public interest, and any issues relating to privacy were outweighed by the public's right to know.

While this case is extraordinary, it is not without precedent. CTV News, and other news organizations in the city, have on occasion aired the addresses of individuals in the past, when we believed the information was in the public interest.

I sincerely hope this answers your questions. I appreciate your position, and while I have no doubt that there are others who share your opinion, this was an editorial decision that was made after careful consideration.

Finally, Mr. [H.], I was disappointed to read in your letter that when you telephoned the CTV Toronto newsroom, your concerns were "dismissed". I want to assure you that our policy at CTV News is to treat all callers with respect and professionalism, and I apologize for any lack of courtesy in this instance. I have reminded the newsroom staff of this policy.

CTV is a member in good standing of the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council and adheres to its guidelines.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your concerns.

Additional Correspondence

The complainant filed his Ruling Request on July 7 with the following letter:

I am not satisfied with the response of CTV News dated July 7th, 2006 and am requesting a ruling from the CBSC.

Firstly, in the broadcaster's letter they claim that it is CTV's position that the public has the right to know certain information, including where the accused [*sic*] lived. However, I question why the public needs to know the address of a person merely suspected of an offence. If these individuals were actually convicted of terrorism related offences, then I would agree that revealing the full addresses would be in the public interest. However, since these individuals did not receive their day in court, the airing of the addresses prejudiced their right to a fair trial. This violated Article 9 of the RTNDA which states: "In reporting matters that are or may be before the courts, broadcast journalists will ensure that their reporting does not interfere with the rights of an individual to a fair trial." The reporting of the addresses held no public value except to create fear and paranoia from local residents, which might have threatened the public safety of the residents residing in the homes of those aired addresses.

Secondly, in the letter from the broadcaster, [the Vice-President] claims that CTV News "have on occasion aired the addresses of individuals in the past, when we believed the information was in the public interest." As a viewer of CFTO News since 1991, I have never seen this news station display the addresses of suspected individuals of crime offences in that fashion. Therefore, [the Vice-President's] claim is disingenuous because I believe that CTV News only aired the addresses of convicted individuals, such as convicted rapists and/or pedophiles, to warn the public about their present location.

Displaying the addresses of these individuals in this unprecedented fashion on the June 3rd, 2006 broadcast violated Article 4 of the *RTNDA Code of Ethics* which states that: "Broadcast journalists will respect the dignity, privacy and well-being of everyone with whom they deal, and will make every effort to ensure that news gathering and reporting does not unreasonably infringe privacy except when necessary in the public interest."

[The Vice-President] also attempts to under-emphasize the seriousness of airing the addresses by stating that the address information: "is available in telephone directories and the internet." Although this is technically true, a number of the individuals have rather common last names which would make it difficult to locate in either the telephone directories and/or the internet. Additionally, some of these individuals might have had their names removed from the public directories. Therefore, [the Vice-President]'s claim is not accurate.

Since the airing of the full addresses of the suspected individuals held no public value, it infringed on their privacy and their right to a fair trial. The act was premature, unprofessional and unprecedented. I also find it strange that on the 11:30 pm CFTO News broadcast on the same day, the numbers of the addresses were omitted, to reveal the street name only. If [the Vice-President] claims that they acted in the public interest, why were the street addresses modified on the 11:30 pm news broadcast?

This incident has left me disturbed because of the lack of equality in reporting similar past events from this news station. Although the accused individuals are suspected of serious offenses, the broadcaster has to ensure that they are adhering to the *Codes of Ethics* that govern their profession in an unbiased and professional manner.