

# Broadcaster Manual

for the Canadian program classification system using on-screen icons



Prepared for Canadian English-language Programming services

by

the Action Group on Violence on Television (AGVOT)

September, 1997

# Introduction

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This manual has been developed to provide guidance to your programming and operational staff, as they implement the television program rating system designed for English-language programming services.

Developed over the last eighteen months by the Canadian broadcast, cable and production industry, this classification system is based on extensive research and consultation with parents and with public interest groups. It was approved by the Canadian Radio-television & Telecommunications Commission on June 18, 1997, in CRTC Public Notice 1997-80. The rating system, working in conjunction with the various broadcaster codes on violence and the independent compliance mechanism of the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council, will give Canadian parents the most comprehensive and advanced parental control system in the world.

The Canadian classification system, the most widely tested in the world, uses consistent and clear guidelines to evaluate the content of television programs. The guidelines centre on violence, but include language and sexual content as well. The content evaluation is assigned a rating according to the generally accepted stages of child development. Parents are already familiar with this approach in classifying movies, books, games, toys and other childrens' products.

While the system was designed to work with the V-chip, the introduction of this technology has been delayed. As an interim measure, Canadian program services have agreed to display program ratings onscreen by the Fall of 1997. The CBC, the Canadian Association of Broadcasters, the Specialty and Premium Television Association and educational broadcasters have collectively agreed to the onscreen displays contained in this manual.

French language programmers, and premium services in both languages will continue to use their own established ratings systems for this purpose, as had been agreed to by the CRTC, and will also display the ratings information on-screen.

The Canadian broadcast and cable industries have always been world leaders in dealing with social concerns such as violence on television. The introduction of a comprehensive classification system for television programming is yet another service to our viewers and their families. In addition to incorporating the rating system into your station's programming and operational routines, all services are being asked to do what ever they feel is appropriate to make the rating system and the icons familiar to their viewers, to ensure this valuable tool is understood and used by Canadian parents.

Thank you for your help in making this new Canadian broadcasting initiative a success.

Trina McQueen  
President, The Discovery Channel  
Chair, The Action Group on Violence on Television

# Background

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The issue of violence in television programming has been the focus of public concern and CRTC policies for a number of years. The Canadian broadcast industry has responded by developing extensive self-regulatory codes and guidelines.

In March 1996, after holding a series of public hearings across the country, the Commission issued a public notice which said programming services must rate certain types of programming for violent content, and that the cable industry must provide V-chip technology to any of their subscribers who wanted it. This would help parents make informed choices as to what they considered appropriate viewing for their children.

The pan-industry organization known as the Action Group on Violence on Television (AGVOT), which represents broadcasters, cable, specialty and pay services, program producers and advertisers, was assigned the responsibility of developing the classification system.

The original implementation date for this was September 1996. However, as AGVOT began working on developing the ratings system and its integration with V-chip technology, it became apparent that the September 1996 deadline was not achievable. AGVOT subsequently asked the CRTC for an extension to the Fall of 1997 and the Commission agreed to this new date.

The extension gave the industry time to field-test the industry's classification system, along with new and improved V-chip technology. That trial took place in early 1997.

The CRTC had mandated AGVOT to develop a classification system that would rate only violent program content. However, as they built the rating system, it became clear to the committee of programmers that a system which focused only on violence would not adequately serve the needs of viewers, particularly parents. There would be occasions when a program would contain no violence, yet not be suitable for younger audiences due to language, nudity, sexuality, and/or mature themes. A violence-only rating system would not be functional in informing parents about this other content.

Furthermore, in research conducted for AGVOT, parents overwhelmingly agreed that coarse language, nudity, depictions of sexuality and mature themes should be included in a television classification system which had violence as *the most important content element* to be rated.

The Committee subsequently developed a ratings structure which blended all of these content elements into a comprehensive classification system, in order to provide even more information to parents than had been requested by the CRTC.

The comprehensive classification system which encompasses all content elements was well received by Canadian families in the field-trial in early 1997. The violence portion of the system was approved by the CRTC in June of 1997.

The Commission also agreed to the broadcast industry's proposal to use the ratings on-screen beginning in the Fall of 1997, to give the industry additional time to work out the unresolved technical problems related to electronically encoding programs to work with V-chip technology.

# Program Categories to be Classified

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The CRTC, in Public Notice 1996-36 directed programming services to encode the following categories of programming:

- children's programming - any programming produced specifically for viewers from ages 2-12
- drama programming - dramatic series or strips, soaps, made-for-television movies, sit-com series or strips
- "reality-shows" - defined as reality-based dramatic programming such as "Rescue 911" or "Unsolved Mysteries"
- feature films - theatrical productions subsequently aired by television

**The Rating Icons contained in this manual are to be applied to all the categories of programs detailed above, no matter when they are scheduled.**

In addition to programs, the CRTC's decision instructed broadcasters to also rate the following:

- station promotion spots for any of the above-mentioned program categories
- paid advertising for theatrical releases

**These promotional spots and paid advertisements will only have to be rated once electronic encoding for the V-chip is introduced. As the On-screen icons are an interim measure, they are not required to be keyed over this material.**

# The Classification System

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The rating system to be used by English-language programming services has six levels, plus an Exempt level for programming which does not have to be classified. This Exempt category includes all information-based programming such as: newscasts, public affairs shows, magazine programs, talk shows, and documentaries. Sports programming is also exempt from classification, as are music videos and variety programming.

**Exempt programming does not require an on-screen icon. However it will have to be electronically encoded once the V-chip is introduced, as the chip has the capability of blocking out any un-rated programming.**

The levels of the Canadian Classification system are outlined below. Full descriptions of each level are provided on the following pages:

- E Exempt**
- C Children**
- C8+ Children eight years and older**
- G General programming, suitable for all audiences**
- PG Parental guidance**
- 14+ Viewers 14 years and older**
- 18+ Adult programming**

# Canadian Television Ratings

a comprehensive classification system for violence and  
other program content for use by English language  
television programming services

Developed by the

Action Group on Violence on Television

(AGVOT)

April 30, 1997

## EXEMPT

### Descriptive

Exempt programming includes: news, sports, documentaries and other information programming; talk shows, music videos, and variety programming.

**Note: exempt programming does not require an icon for on-screen ratings**



CHILDREN

### Descriptive

Programming intended for children with this designation must adhere to the provisions of the Children's section of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) Voluntary Code on Violence in Television Programming.

As this programming is intended for younger children under the age of 8 years, it will pay careful attention to themes which could threaten their sense of security and well-being. As programming for children requires particular caution in the depiction of violence, there will be no realistic scenes of violence. Depictions of aggressive behaviour will be infrequent and limited to portrayals that are clearly imaginary and unrealistic in nature.

### Violence Guidelines

**- might contain occasional comedic, unrealistic depictions**

### Other Content Guidelines

Language -no offensive language

Sex/Nudity -none



CHILDREN over 8 years

### Descriptive

This classification is applied to children's programming that is generally considered acceptable for youngsters 8 years and over to view on their own. It is suggested that a parent/guardian co-view programming assigned this classification with younger children under the age of 8.

Programming with this designation adheres to the provisions of the Children's Section of the CAB Voluntary Code on Violence. These include not portraying violence as the preferred, acceptable, or only way to resolve conflict; or encouraging children to imitate dangerous acts which they may see on the screen.

Programming within this classification might deal with themes which could be unsuitable for younger children. References to any such controversial themes shall be discreet and sensitive to the 8-12 year age range of this viewing group.

### Violence Guidelines

- any realistic depictions will be infrequent, discreet, of low intensity, and shall portray the consequences of violence.
- violence portrayed must be within the context of the storyline or character development.
- might include mild physical violence, comedic violence, comic horror, special effects; fantasy, supernatural, or animated violence

### Other Content Guidelines

- |            |  |
|------------|--|
| Language   | -no profanity  |
|            | -might have infrequent use of language which may be considered by some to be socially offensive or discriminatory, and then only if employed within the context of storyline or character development. |
| Sex/Nudity | -none  |



**GENERAL**

Considered acceptable for all age groups. Appropriate viewing for the entire family.

### Descriptive

This is programming intended for a broad, general audience. While not designed specifically for children, it is understood that younger viewers may be part of the audience. Therefore programming within this classification shall contain very little violence, either physical, verbal or emotional.

It will be sensitive to themes which could threaten a younger child's sense of security, and will depict no realistic scenes of violence which minimize or gloss over the effects of violent acts.

### Violence Guidelines

- minimal, infrequent
- may contain comedic, unrealistic depictions
- contains no frightening special effects not required by storyline

### Other Content Guidelines



- Language - may contain inoffensive slang,  
- no profanity
- Sex/Nudity -none



PARENTAL GUIDANCE

### Descriptive

This programming, while intended for a general audience, may not be suitable for younger children (under the age of 8). Parents/guardians should be aware that there might be content elements which some could consider inappropriate for unsupervised viewing by children in the 8-13 age range.

Programming within this classification might address controversial themes or issues. Cognizant that pre-teens and early teens could be part of this viewing group, particular care must be taken not to encourage imitational behaviour, and consequences of violent actions shall not be minimized.

### Violence Guidelines

- any depiction of conflict and/or aggression will be limited and moderate; it might include physical, fantasy, or supernatural violence.
- any such depictions should not be pervasive, and must be justified within the context of theme, storyline or character development.

### Other Content Guidelines

- Language - might contain infrequent and mild profanity  
- might contain mildly suggestive language
- Sex/Nudity - could possibly contain brief scenes of nudity  
- might have limited and discreet sexual references or content when appropriate to the storyline or theme



OVER 14 YEARS

### Descriptive

Programming with this classification contains themes or content elements which might not be suitable for viewers under the age of 14. Parents are strongly cautioned to exercise discretion in permitting viewing by pre-teens and early teens without parent/guardian supervision, as programming with this classification could deal with mature themes and societal issues in a realistic fashion.

### **Violence Guidelines**

- while violence could be one of the dominant elements of the storyline, it must be integral to the development of plot or character.
- might contain intense scenes of violence.

### **Other Content Guidelines**

- |            |   |
|------------|---|
| Language   | -could possibly include strong or frequent use of profanity                                     |
| Sex/Nudity | -might include scenes of nudity and/or sexual activity within the context of narrative or theme |



Intended for viewers 18 years and older.

### **Descriptive**

This classification applies to programming which could contain any or all of the following content elements which would make the program unsuitable for viewers under the age of 18.

### **Violence Guidelines**

- might contain depictions of violence, which while integral to the development of plot, character or themes, are intended for adult viewing, and thus are not suitable for audiences under 18 years of age.

### **Other Content Guidelines**

- |            |  |
|------------|--|
| Language   | - might contain graphic language                         |
| Sex/Nudity | - might contain explicit portrayals of sex and/or nudity |

### **Technical Specifications**

#### **Placement**

The icons are to be used in the top left hand corner of the screen, inside the safe zone.

<b>Shape/Height</b>	They are to be a minimum of 52 scan lines tall. This should be big enough to cover the US rating on any programming which is fed to you with the American icons burned in. However, you will find there is some degree of inconsistency in the size of the US icons. Stations are advised to experiment to ensure your icons are big enough to cover the US rating symbol on shows fed to you from American distributors.
<b>Density</b>	The Canadian icons are to be 100% opaque, in order to fully cover any US rating symbols, therefore they do not require a linear keyer for operational use.
<b>Colour</b>	The icons are to be used in a black & white format.

### Accessing the Icons

There are a number of options open to you to obtain the icon graphics.

<b>Digital</b>	The <u>icon graphics</u> are available now as separate files on the Canadian Association of Broadcasters web site. The CAB web address is <b>www.cab-acr.ca</b> . Once you have accessed the CAB's home page, click on the <b>AGVOT</b> line, then follow directions for downloading each separate icon graphic, which you can then transfer to a PC/Mac or character generator, and manipulate for on-air use.
<b>Hard Copy</b>	A full page rendering of each of the icons is included in this manual. They can be scanned into a computer, or shot with a studio camera to videotape for video processing.
<b>Video</b>	A training video is being planned for satellite distribution in late September, which will include full frame video of each of the icons that can be captured for your use. You will be advised of the date, time and satellite co-ordinates for this video feed.

### Equipment Considerations

The simplicity of the icon design, combined with the lack of colour and full opaque presentation provides stations with a range of equipment options for the display of these graphic icons.

Some stations are looking at equipment similar to the Leitch LogoMotion, which provides the flexibility to both size and position the icons. Other stations are looking at using PC or Mac-based character generators linked to their Master Control.

Another option is to use the "bug inserter" which stations employ to display their call letters or logo. Contact your equipment manufacturer to determine if they will be able to provide you with a card complete with the icon ratings that can be incorporated into this piece of equipment. While it will give stations the flexibility to use the same box for two purposes, the ratings icons and the "bug" will, of course, not be able to be on-screen at the same time.

For those stations moving towards automation systems, it is suggested that in your discussions with the manufacturer, you ask that the software include a ratings icon field, to provide for automated insertion of a rating key.

## **Icon Use Protocols**

### **Frequency**

The rating icon is to be keyed over the first 15-16 seconds of the program. It is expected the Americans will have their ratings up for 15 seconds. For programs which run longer than one hour, the icon is to be repeated at the beginning of the second hour. These are minimal use standards; stations may wish to use the icons more frequently on programs with particularly sensitive content.

### **Covering US Icons**

It is incumbent on Canadian program services to cover any US rating icons on *those program categories which must be classified by Canadian broadcasters*. Therefore, if your service receives any children's programs, drama programs, reality-based drama programs or feature films with the US icons burned in, you are required to superimpose a Canadian classification.

On programs such as talk shows, which carry a US rating but which are not required to be classified under Canadian regulations, no Canadian icon is required.

### **Advisories**

It is suggested that the icon not appear in any advisory which precedes a program, but rather be keyed over the first 15 seconds of the actual show, following the advisory.

### **Logging**

There is no regulatory requirement to report how a show was rated on the program log which is filed with the CRTC. However, a record of how a program was rated should be retained for a minimum of 30 days in the event of a viewer complaint.

### **TV Listings**

Program services are requested to add the classification information to their program schedules that are filed with the various tv listings services. This will allow the ratings to be included in the various TV guides published by the daily newspapers, and the TV Guide magazine.

### **Start Date**

Canadian programming services are obligated by the CRTC to begin rating their programming by the Fall, and most services are generally working towards an implementation date of September 29th to have these on-screen ratings icons in place. However this is a flexible target. Some services may opt to begin earlier if their equipment and procedures are in place. If for technical reasons your service is unable to be fully operational by this date, please make every effort to be on-screen as quickly as possible thereafter.

## **Ratings and The Broadcast Standards Council**

In its report to the Commission of September 6, 1996, AGVOT indicated that the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council was prepared to act as an intermediary to resolve disputes between programming services and their viewers regarding classification levels applied to programs.

The process would be identical to the CBSC's current role in ensuring adherence to industry Codes. Any viewer who believed that a programming service did not classify a program correctly would have the right to have his or her complaint referred to the CBSC for adjudication, if the disagreement was unable to be resolved satisfactorily between the viewer and the programming service, either conventional (over-the-air) or specialty.

As well, the Council is currently exploring how best it can serve as a clearing house for sharing program classification information, as mentioned in CRTC Public Notice 1996-36. The CBSC maintains an information-filled website **[www.cbsc.ca](http://www.cbsc.ca)** and sees that facility as the best way to facilitate exchanges of programming ratings information.

Additional news regarding the development of this program classification information exchange will be forthcoming from the CBSC.

## **Appendices**

Included in this section of the manual are the full-page renditions of the icon graphics, which can either be scanned, or fed into your character generator by camera video.

For your background information you will find the CRTC Public Notice 1997-80, the decision in which the Commission approved the Classification system, and the interim use of on-screen icons.

As background reference material to assist you in rating your Broadcaster Manual for Canadian program classification system using on-screen icons programming for violent content, we have included the CAB's Voluntary Code on Violence in Television Programming ; and excerpts from a publication entitled *Prime Time Parent*, prepared by the Alliance for Children in Television. These pages chart the development of children, and provide helpful advice on themes which are of concern to children at certain ages.

Also included is information on the American ratings system, the US - TV Parental Guidelines.