

Policy on Violence in Television Programming

Here is a brief summary of the CRTC's official report, *Respecting Children: A Canadian Approach to Helping Families Deal with Television Violence* (Public Notice CRTC 1996-36), following the October 1995 CRTC Hearing on Violence in Television Programming. The report was released on March 14, 1996.

Respecting Children: A Canadian Approach to Helping Families Deal with Television Violence

The CRTC recognizes the industry's contributions to the production of high-quality, non-violent Canadian children's programs – in particular, the Shaw Children's Programming Initiative (\$4.2 million in 1994 and 1995) and the Cable Production Fund (over \$7 million from 1994 to 1996). The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission is nevertheless determined to protect children from the harmful effects of television violence, while preserving freedom of expression for creators and freedom of choice for adult viewers. To do this, the Commission has focused its efforts in three specific areas:

Giving individuals the tools to make informed programming choices for themselves and their families

By September 1996, all programs will be coded with a rating for violence, and affordable V-chips will be available to the public. The V-chip enables families to block programs they feel are unsuitable from their home television sets. As well, by December 1996 (at the latest), cable distributors will ensure that non-Canadian programming on their systems is coded with a V-chip rating.

The Commission has designated the Action Group on Violence on Television (AGVOT) to develop a four- to six-level rating system. This will respond to the public's concern and be practical to implement. The Commission is encouraging the industry to develop a single rating system for the country, and is asking programmers to be sensitive to time zones when scheduling programs.

At a minimum, the Commission expects the following to be encoded with ratings at all times:

- children's programming (intended for those 12 years of age and under)
- drama
- reality-based dramatic programs
- feature films
- promotions for these programs
- ads for movie releases

Pay television and pay-per-view services should continue to use the ratings of the provincial classification boards for the feature films they televise.

Given the importance of freedom of expression in the reporting of news, the Commission will not expect news stories to be rated. The Commission is confident that the Radio-television News Directors' Association Code of Ethics, the journalistic guidelines of individual broadcasters, and the provisions in the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) code on the reporting of violence, will ensure that violence is depicted with sensitivity and respect for the audience, with no exploitation, exaggeration or sensationalism. The Commission supports the measures undertaken by broadcasters to advise viewers when graphic news stories are presented.

Enlisting the co-operation of the broadcasting industry to develop strong, credible self-regulatory codes

The Commission expects all distributors to become members of the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council (CBSC), which should act as an arbitrator in disputes and as a clearinghouse for the exchange of ratings information. The Commission promises to monitor any changes made to the Council's structure and procedures due to the expansion of its membership, and the implementation of a national rating system for violence. It will also consider measures taken by the CBSC to improve public awareness of the Council, and to simplify the CBSC complaints process.

Encouraging the involvement of all players, including the broadcasting industry, parents, teachers and the medical community, to change attitudes through public awareness and media literacy programs

The Commission, believing that it is necessary to change attitudes about the acceptability of TV violence for children, commends and looks favourably on all those who increase public awareness of the nature and influence of the media. Since most English-language programming in Canada is imported, the Commission will continue to develop effective international solutions. Finally, the Commission will monitor all developments in the industry to ensure the protection of children.

You can find the complete report *Respecting Children: A Canadian Approach to Helping Families Deal with Television Violence* on the CRTC web site at <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/social/tv.htm>