



## Nine breached code of practice over suicide reports

**ACMA has found that TCN Channel Nine Pty Ltd (Nine), the licensee of Sydney commercial television service TCN, breached regulatory safeguards for reports about suicide in a segment on the *60 Minutes* program. ACMA also found Nine failed to adequately warn viewers before the segment about the potentially distressing material.**

The finding arose from a complaint that a segment about the suicides of two teenagers, broadcast in April 2007, did not comply with the requirements for reports about suicide set out in the *Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice 2004* (the code).

Under clause 4.3.9 of the code, licensees should broadcast such material only where there is an identifiable public interest reason and any report should exclude a detailed description of the method used.

The report must be straightforward and must not include graphic details or images, or glamorise suicide in any way.

ACMA found that the segment on *60 Minutes* contained a detailed description of the suicide method and was not straightforward in its

'For this reason, in addition to requiring that there be a legitimate public interest reason for broadcasting such a report, the code also imposes restrictions on the way the subject matter is treated.'

Nine has advised ACMA that it will incorporate the findings in its regular training program for staff. As well as asking Nine to ensure that any future reports about suicide comply with the code, ACMA has also recommended that the licensee include relevant help line numbers with such reports so that viewers have access to support if required.

ACMA will be encouraging all broadcasters to consider this approach when reporting incidents of suicide to ensure that vulnerable viewers are made aware of available help.

complainant that he or she could refer the matter to ACMA if unsatisfied with Seven's response.

Mr Chapman said that 'the successful operation of codes of practice, and indeed the very efficacy of the co-regulatory approach established under the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*, relies on the effectiveness of measures for dealing with viewer complaints, and the opportunity for complainants to refer unresolved complaints to ACMA'.

In response to ACMA's finding, Seven has undertaken to:

- provide the final investigation report, together with an explanation of the decision, to senior news and current affairs staff and senior management, including the Board of Directors
- include the final report in the existing code-training materials so that it forms part of future code-training sessions attended by all staff
- ensure that all complaint responses are overseen by Seven's Regulatory and Business Affairs Department to help ensure that all complaint responses comply with the code.

Section 7 of the code contains provisions for handling of complaints and includes the requirement that licensees advise a complainant that complaints may be referred to ACMA if the licensee's written response is deemed unsatisfactory.

The investigation reports are available on the ACMA website at <[www.acma.gov.au](http://www.acma.gov.au)> (go to About ACMA: Publications & research > Publications > Broadcasting publications > Investigations > Television operations investigations).

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presentation of the facts. ACMA also found that while the segment contained a warning it did not precede the segment, as the code requires.

'Reports about suicide pose complex issues for the media,' said Chris Chapman, ACMA Chairman. 'While there are legitimate public interest reasons for covering certain incidents in news and current affairs programs, extreme care must be taken to ensure that stories of this nature do not inadvertently encourage vulnerable members of the community to imitate the behaviour.'

ACMA also found that Channel Seven Melbourne Pty Ltd (Seven), the licensee of commercial television service HSV, breached the code's complaints-handling provisions with a segment on *Seven News* about the two suicides. The finding results from a complaint that the segment, also broadcast in April 2007, did not comply with the requirements for reports on suicide.

ACMA found that, while the report itself did not breach the code, Seven failed to advise the