
APPENDIX B

CBSC Decision 06/07-0061 CKNW-AM re Dawson College Shooting Coverage

The Complaint

The CBSC received the following complaint via the CRTC:

This was an affiliate of CKNW in Vancouver, a talk show station in Montreal Sept 13.

During the shooting incident at the Montreal College, the talk show host actually took a call of a student by cell phone who was held up with 24 others on the seventh floor while the gunman possibly was still in the building.

This, in a situation like this or in a terrorist situation, could have tipped the gunman to the whereabouts of the trapped people. This has to be stopped and regulations put in place in this type of situation as lives were put in jeopardy.

Given the complainant's first sentence above, it was initially unclear to the CBSC Secretariat on which station the complainant had heard the broadcast. It therefore requested additional information from him. He sent that additional information in four separate e-mails on September 18:

Thanks for your reply. The station call letters are 940 (Montreal) (CINW).

I appreciate the protocol on how this might be handled; however, on issues like this, lives were potentially put into jeopardy.

Gunmen, like at Dawson College, and terrorists are very much publicity-driven and this radio host, by disclosing over the airwaves where the location of 24 students barracked [sic] on the 7th floor by a caller who was trapped with the others, was irresponsible. The gunman could have been listening as is [sic] if the worst happened the station would have been sued for criminal wrong-doing with little help to those who might have died.

I feel it is up to all those concerned to address these serious issues, as within a democracy freedom of speech is one thing, but even in a democratic country, having a freedom and potentially causing death by negligence are two different matters.

I beg you to take a pro-active stance in this issue, as this could develop to a tragedy [sic] in the future.

I believe it was around 12:00 pm PST. This also was about 45 minutes into the time from the CINW broadcast from Vancouver.

The gunman at this time had not yet been reported as being shot and killed, and there was

still suspect [sic] that there were possibly a few gunmen, their motive unknown.

The radio station here that broadcast the Montreal station is CKNW 980, *Bill Good* talk show. I have contacted them for more specific times.

I have just listened to the section from the vault archive of CKNW 980 who broadcast the live happening on Sept 13th. The time was just after 11:09 am Pacific Standard Time. The caller stated there were 30-40 students in the "lab" on the 7th floor, several suspected gunmen still at large.

Very upsetting how this was handled.

Broadcaster's Response

CKNW responded to the complainant on October 27:

The Canadian Broadcast Standards Council (the CBSC) has asked us to respond to your email of September 18th in which you raise concerns about content aired on CKNW during live coverage of the shooting at Dawson College in Montreal on Wednesday, September 13, 2006.

When this tragic event occurred, CKNW Vancouver began airing a live feed from our sister station 940 CINW Montreal. Within that coverage, as the station worked to provide the community with the latest information about the situation, many live calls were aired. One such call came from a student who, with her class, was barricaded inside a lab within the school. The student was calling for help, making sure the authorities knew of their whereabouts and that they were coming to their rescue.

Specifically, your concern is that by broadcasting this call, the lives of the students in the lab were put in danger as the gunman could have been listening and been alerted to their location.

We have reviewed the broadcast and we respectfully disagree that the students were put in further danger through the airing of this call and would make the assertion that the students' ability to communicate their whereabouts from within the school would have helped expedite their rescue.

Covering live news events and emergencies for our communities is a role that we consider vital and take very seriously at Corus Radio. We consider it a privilege that our communities depend on us for important information in times of emergency. Please rest assured that this is a responsibility that we do not take lightly. Our managers, producers and hosts spend many hours on training and preparation for live news events to ensure that when news happens we broadcast to our community instantly, effectively and responsibly.

Please be assured that our programming producers are sensitive to everything that is broadcast on the station, while still ensuring that the station does present controversial topics

of public interest.

We hope that we have addressed your concerns. At CKNW we recognize the importance of listener feedback and appreciate all comments. Thank you for taking the time and initiative to share your concerns with us.

Additional Correspondence

The complainant submitted his Ruling Request on November 2 with the following letter:

It is of some regret that CKNW and Corus Entertainment Inc. did not admit any wrong-doing of their broadcast of the tragic events that happened at Dawson College on Wednesday September 13, 2006.

I, however, had anticipated from the broadcaster such a response; as in any business, they might see rules and regulation as an impediment for them to compete in the market place, and restrictions to broadcast as they see appropriate might result in lost market share, and in turn lost advertising revenue. Why would the media admit to such a mistake?

From the recent events that happened at Dawson College, one could argue that radio listeners might have been better informed in this type of crisis situation from more factual reporting than fielding live calls from people crying and family members wanting to know the whereabouts of their children who were there and possibly in danger however dramatic the broadcasting was to the radio audience.

It could also be said that it is no leap of the imagination to suspect that gunmen and terrorists might actually thrive on this publicity to promote their cause by attracting attention to their plight, as terrorist acts are often designed as theatre – as spectacular events with a dramatic content that spellbinds an audience, precisely the kind of story that attracts the media.

All that said, my main concern and objection to Corus Network's response is that they actually see no wrong-doing by broadcasting live the whereabouts of the trapped students and actually perversely state that it might have expedited their escape. It must be remembered that at the time of the call from one of the trapped 40 students in the lab room that it was not known if this was a terrorist attack or an attack by several gunmen such as at Columbine School. It is reasonable to say that if there was any concern for the trapped students, the radio station might have stopped the call being broadcast and contacted the police and rescue forces off air with the location of the students to assist in their release. What if several gunmen or terrorists were actually listening to this broadcast and used it to their advantage for locating trapped people to kill or hold hostage; or possibly the gunman or terrorist organisations might have used the radio station to divert police or anti-terrorist forces away from their activities?

I am troubled that Corus Radio admits no responsibility in their broadcasting of the whereabouts of the barricaded students hiding from danger, but if the events unfolded differently in loss of lives would their response be the same? It's not hard to suspect that family members of the deceased would have sued them for gross negligence by disclosure of where the students were.

I therefore ask that this type of broadcasting be regulated in events such as gunmen and terrorist attacks, as these are serious and have dangerous outcomes for all individuals involved. I feel it is not enough for the Corus group or other media networks to apologize

publicly, as these are very disturbing and serious matters in our current times.

I urgently recommend to the governing body that this response by the Corus Group be reviewed and acted upon by implementing policy with clear guidelines with substantial fines levied when violated. It is only this type of regulation that will keep broadcasters from acting irresponsible [*sic*] in similar tragic situations that might happen in the future. If and when any death transpires in future as a result of this type of broadcasting, my concerns are on record and had been reviewed, acted on or ignored.