



Broadcast News Distortion

The FCC's authority to take action on complaints about the accuracy or bias of news networks, stations, reporters or commentators in how they cover – or sometimes opt to not cover – events is narrow. The agency is prohibited by law from engaging in censorship or infringing on First Amendment rights of the press. Those protected rights include, but are not limited to, a broadcaster's selection and presentation of news or commentary and are covered in more detail in "[The FCC and Speech](#)" guide.

What is the FCC's responsibility?

The FCC has had a policy against “news distortion” in over-the-air broadcast (local TV and radio stations) news for over 50 years. Cable news networks, newspapers or newsletters (whether online or print), social media platforms, online-only streaming outlets, or any other non-broadcast news platform are outside of the FCC’s jurisdiction with respect to news distortion.

News distortion “must involve a significant event and not merely a minor or incidental aspect of the news report.” In weighing the constitutionality of the policy, courts have recognized that the policy “makes a crucial distinction between deliberate distortion and mere inaccuracy or difference of opinion.” As a result, broadcasters are only subject to enforcement if it can be proven that they have *deliberately* distorted a factual news report. Expressions of opinion or errors stemming from mistakes are not actionable.

What if I have comments or concerns about a specific broadcast?

All comments and/or concerns about a specific news broadcast or commentary should first be directed to the local station and network involved, so that the people responsible for making programming decisions can become better informed about audience opinion.

When to file a complaint with the FCC?

If you are dissatisfied with the broadcaster's response, you can file a complaint with the FCC. The fastest way to submit your complaint is through the agency's [online complaint portal for consumers, accessible here](#).

Complaints should include the call sign and community of license of the station, the date and time of the broadcast(s) in question, a detailed description of the alleged distorted news, and a transcript or recording of the broadcast(s) in question.

The FCC will only investigate claims that include evidence showing that the broadcast news report was deliberately intended to mislead viewers or listeners. Evidence may include

testimony from persons who have direct personal knowledge of an intentional falsification of the news (for example, written or oral instructions from station management, outtakes, or evidence of bribery). Without such documented evidence, the FCC generally cannot intervene. The FCC does not investigate claims of collateral inaccuracy in news reports or differences of opinion over the truth or validity of aspects of a news program.

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