[GB] Complaints about Television Advertisement on Climate Change Rejected

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The Advertising Standards Authority, the self-regulatory body to which regulation of advertising content is delegated by the UK communications regulator Ofcom, has not upheld 939 complaints about a government advertisement on the effects of climate change. It did not consider the question of whether the advertisement broke the rules prohibiting political advertising, as this is a matter for Ofcom itself, and did uphold in part complaints about associated newspaper advertisements.

The television advertisement for the Government's 'Act on Co2' campaign showed a young girl being read a bedtime story illustrating the effects of climate change and suggesting that whether there will be a happy ending is up to the viewer. Related newspaper advertisements illustrated the issue of climate change through popular nursery rhymes (e.g., 'Rub a dub dub, three men in a tub, a necessary course of action due to flash flooding caused by climate change'). Complaints were made on ten grounds, including that the television advertisement could be distressing for children, it was misleading because it presented human induced climate change as a fact, and that a claim that 'over 40% of the CO2 was coming from ordinary everyday things' was misleading. The Authority rejected all complaints about the television advertisement. The advertisement was not to be broadcast in or around programmes made specifically for children, so it was unlikely to cause harm or undue distress. Major international bodies were in agreement about the evidence for human induced climate change whereas no national or international bodies with climate science expertise disagreed, so it was reasonable to rely on this evidence. The claim about the sources of CO2 was qualified in the advertisement and based on official statistics and so was unlikely to mislead.

The Authority did uphold complaints that two of the press advertisements should have been phrased more tentatively in their predictions of extreme weather conditions.

Advertising Standards Authority, 'ASA Adjudication on Department of Energy and Climate Change', 17 March 2010

http://www.asa.org.uk/Complaints-and-ASA-action/Adjudications/2010/3/Department-of-Energy-and-Climate-Change/TF_ADJ_48225.aspx

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