[US] Federal Communications Commission refines regulation of children's television programming

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The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) recently concluded that its original rules implementing the Children's Television Act of 1990 (CTA) have not been fully effective in encouraging broadcasters to increase the amount of educational and informational broadcast television programming available to children. Specifically, the FCC found that new rules were necessary because some broadcasters were providing little educational programming and that broadcasters varied widely in their understanding of what type of programming constituted educational programming under the CTA. Therefore, the FCC revised their rules on 8 August 1996. The FCC previously defined "educational and informational television programming" as "any television programming that furthers the educational and informational needs of children 16 years of age and under in any respect, including children's intellectual/cognitive or social/emotional needs." The FCC has now revised its rules and established a new definition of required core programming to include the following elements: (1) the programme has education as a "significant" purpose; (2) the educational objective is specified in writing in the children's programming report; (3) the programme is aired between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m.; (4) the programme is regularly scheduled at least once a week; (5) the programme is at least 30 minutes in length; and (6) the programme is identified as educational programming when it is aired, and instructions listing it as educational programming are provided by the licensee to the programme guides.

Public information initiatives were instituted to allow marketplace forces to achieve the goals of the CTA. For example, the FCC's new rules require on-air identification of educational programming, mandatory provision of information to publishers of programme guides and listings identifying core programmes and which segment of the audience the programs are intended for, and quarterly programming reports describing how the programming meets the FCC's definition of educational programming together with advertizing encouraging the public to use the reports. The FCC will use the new guidelines in the license renewal process to ensure that a broadcaster has met its responsibility under the CTA. The new rules will take effect in the autumn of 1997.

The FCC explained that programming specifically designed to educate children was particularly important to children of lower income families, who were less likely to subscribe to cable television or other similar services. The FCC noted that

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broadcasters do not have an incentive to provide educational programming absent regulation because broadcasters raise revenues through advertising fees. Children's programming audiences are smaller than general audiences, especially because educational programming must generally be targeted at segments of the child audience. The smaller audiences reduce advertising revenues, as do regulatory advertising limits during children's programming. Information on law related policy developments which may have legal consequences but of which no documents or other texts are available yet.

Federal Communications Commission, `Policies and Rules Concerning Children's Television Programming. Revision of Programming Policies for Television Broadcast Stations', Report and Order, FCC 96-335. Adopted: 8 August 1996. Released: 8 August 1996, MM Docket No. 93-48.

http://www.fcc.gov/Bureaus/Mass_Media/Orders/fcc96335.txt

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