



## Broadcasting False Information

The FCC occasionally receives complaints regarding allegedly false information aired on TV or radio. The FCC reviews all complaints for possible violation of its rules, which are narrow in scope.

### Broadcasting false information that causes substantial ‘public harm’

The FCC prohibits broadcasting false information about a crime or a catastrophe if the broadcaster knows the information is false and will cause substantial “public harm” if aired.

FCC rules specifically say that “the public harm: must begin immediately and cause direct and actual damage to property or the health or safety of the general public; or divert law enforcement or public health and safety authorities from their duties.”

Broadcasters may air disclaimers that clearly characterize programming as fiction to avoid violating FCC rules about public harm.

### Broadcasting false content during news programming

The FCC is prohibited by law from engaging in censorship or infringing on First Amendment rights of the press. It is, however, illegal for broadcasters to intentionally distort the news, and the FCC may act on complaints if there is documented evidence of such behavior from persons with direct personal knowledge. For more information, please see our consumer guide, [Complaints About Broadcast Journalism](http://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/complaints-about-broadcast-journalism) ([www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/complaints-about-broadcast-journalism](http://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/complaints-about-broadcast-journalism)).

### Filing a complaint

To report possible violations of FCC broadcast rules, you have multiple options for filing a complaint:

- File a complaint online at [consumercomplaints.fcc.gov](http://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov)
- By phone: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322); TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322); ASL: 1-844-432-2275
- By mail (please include your name, address, contact information and as much detail about your complaint as possible):

Federal Communications Commission  
Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau  
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division  
45 L Street NE, Washington, DC 20554

### Alternate formats

To request this article in an alternate format - braille, large print, Word or text document or audio - write or call us at the address or phone number at the bottom of the page, or send an email to [fcc504@fcc.gov](mailto:fcc504@fcc.gov).

Last Reviewed: 12/30/19

