



NEWS

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This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action.
See MCI v. FCC, 515 F 2d 385 (D.C. Circ 1974).

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FCC LAUNCHES UNPRECEDENTED VIDEO NEWS RELEASE PROBE *Adelstein Committed to Full and Thorough Investigation*

Washington, D.C. – The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has issued 42 Letters of Inquiry to 77 broadcast licensees to determine whether the source of video news releases (VNR) was properly disclosed during news broadcasts. In response to this unprecedented probe, Commissioner Adelstein releases the following statement:

“I’m pleased that the Commission has issued these letters of inquiry. We need a full and thorough investigation to learn all of the facts surrounding the undisclosed broadcast of what appears to be commercial material, and prosecute any violations to the full extent of the law.

The public is misled by individuals who present themselves to be independent, unbiased experts or reporters, but are actually skills promoting a prepackaged corporate agenda. The public has a legal right to know who seeks to persuade them so they can make up their own minds about the credibility of the information presented. Shoddy practices make it difficult for viewers to tell the difference between news and propaganda.”

On April 13th, 2005 the Commission unanimously adopted, on a bipartisan basis, a Public Notice (PN) reminding the media of its responsibilities. The PN said: “.....whenever broadcast stations and cable operators air VNRs, licensees and operators generally must clearly disclose to members of their audience the nature, source and sponsorship of the material that they are viewing.” The Commission said that it would “take appropriate enforcement action against entities that do not comply with these rules.”

If the Commission determines after investigation that a licensee has violated sponsorship identification rules, the FCC may impose monetary fines of up to \$32,500 per violation, and initiate license revocation proceedings against licensees. Section 507 of the Communications Act establishes civil and criminal penalties for violation of disclosure requirements, with the possibility of a fine of up to \$10,000 and as much as a year of imprisonment.