

THE PRESS STANDARDS BOARD OF FINANCE LIMITED
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Editors' Code of Practice Committee

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PRESS INFORMATION

Editors introduce rule on reporting suicide

New press reporting rules designed to help prevent copycat suicides were announced today by the Editors' Code of Practice Committee.

Until now, reporting of suicide has been covered by the Code's general provisions on Intrusion into Grief and Shock, which require the press to carry out inquiries with sympathy and discretion and to handle publication sensitively.

However, as part of its annual Code review, the Committee considered international evidence highlighting the dangers of imitative deaths following reports of suicide.

In the light of that, the Committee, which writes and revises the voluntary Code to which the British press subscribes, felt that the risk of copycat suicides should be addressed specifically.

It has therefore decided to add a new sub-clause (***bold italics below***) to the Clause 5 Intrusion Into Grief and Shock provisions, which will now read:

5i: In cases involving grief or shock, enquiries must be carried out and approaches made with sympathy and discretion. Publication must be handled sensitively at such times, but this should not be interpreted as restricting the right to report judicial proceedings.

***5ii:** *When reporting suicide, care should be taken to avoid excessive detail about the method used.*

The asterisk indicates that under the new sub-clause exceptions could be made if editors could demonstrate that it was in the public interest.

Code Committee chairman Les Hinton, Executive Chairman of News International, said: "During our annual review, we received convincing evidence, from the Samaritans and others, that media reporting of suicide often prompted copycat cases. It is an international phenomenon.

"We have attempted to minimise that risk - while maintaining the public's right to know - by emphasising the need for care to avoid excessive detail, unless it is in the wider public interest to give the information.

"For example, while it might be perfectly proper to report that the suicide was caused by an overdose of Paracetamol, it would probably be excessive to state the number of tablets used.

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"We have consulted with the industry on this and it has been accepted. The new rule, in effect, codifies a practice already currently followed by many editors."

The Press Complaints Commission - which adjudicates on complaints under the Code - has ratified the change, which will take effect from August 7, 2006.

To ensure maximum awareness, the independent Society of Editors will print and distribute 30,000 copies of the new Code, in wallet-size format, to Britain's journalists and to politicians and leaders of civil society.

This is by arrangement with the Press Standards Board of Finance (PressBoF), representing the publishers who co-ordinate and fund the newspaper and magazine industry's actions on self-regulation. PressBoF comprises members of the Newspaper Publishers Association, the Newspaper Society, Periodical Publishers Association, the Scottish Daily Newspaper Society and Scottish Newspaper Publishers Association.

New members appointed

Two new members have been appointed to the Editors' Code of Practice Committee. Adrian Faber, Editor of the *Express and Star*, Wolverhampton, has been nominated by the Newspaper Society to replace Perry Austin-Clarke, of the *Bradford Telegraph and Argus*, who stood down last year. David Pollington, Editor of *The Sunday Post*, is the Scottish Daily Newspaper Society nominee to replace Derek Tucker, of the *Press and Journal*, Aberdeen, who has joined the PCC as a commissioner.

Note for Editors:

The Editors' Code Committee writes, monitors and revises the Editors' Code of Practice. Its current members are: Chairman: Leslie Hinton, News International; Neil Benson, Trinity Mirror Regional Newspapers; Adrian Faber, Express and Star, Wolverhampton; Mike Gilson, The News, Portsmouth; Douglas Melloy, Rotherham and South Yorkshire Advertiser; Ian Murray, Southern Evening Echo; Lindsay Nicholson, Good Housekeeping magazine; Paul Potts, Press Association; Alan Rusbridger, The Guardian; David Pollington, The Sunday Post; Neil Wallis, News of the World; Harriet Wilson, Conde-Nast magazines; John Witherow, Sunday Times, and Peter Wright, The Mail On Sunday.

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