

Press Complaints Commission v Daily Mail

Clauses noted: 5

The Press Complaints Commission has investigated whether an article published on the Daily Mail website under the headline "Man 'carefully planned' his chainsaw death after losing eviction battle with developers", contained excessive detail about the method of suicide used in breach of Clause 5 (Intrusion into grief or shock) of the Code.

The Commission found a breach of the Code.

The article reported the suicide of a man, who had taken his own life using a chainsaw.

The article contained a long and graphic reference to the method of suicide. It set out the precise apparatus that had been constructed by the individual to enable his death.

The newspaper removed all of the detail from the article, as soon as it had been made aware of the problem. It pointed out that online publishing was a 24-hour job, relying on sometimes inexperienced journalists working under tight time pressures. This complaint made clear the need for improved supervision, and the newspaper has taken a series of steps to achieve this for the future.

Adjudication

Clause 5 (ii) was introduced specifically to prohibit the inclusion of detail that would act, in effect, as a blueprint for the method of a suicide. It is crucial that newspapers abide by its terms, in order to minimise the risk of copycat suicides. This means that, particularly in inquest reports (many of which will be provided by external agencies), care needs to be taken in the editing process to remove excessive detail.

On this occasion, the online article contained far too much detail and had not been sufficiently edited. It was a matter of concern that the newspaper had allowed the material to be published on its website, as this was a clear breach of the Code. The Commission welcomed the newspaper's response to this complaint and trusted that the situation would not be repeated.

Adjudication issued 02/01/2009