

**2023-32 Pridham v Tri-Cities Dispatch**

*June 26, 2023*

The National NewsMedia Council has considered and found that corrective action was taken to address a complaint about accuracy and the opportunity to respond to statements in a March 14, 2023, article published by the Tri-Cities Dispatch.

The article reported that a B.C.-based company was fined by the province for failing to comply with recycling regulations. The headline reads, “‘I’ll be going to jail before I comply;’ Coquitlam-based KMS Tools & Equipment fined \$19,000 for refusal to comply with recycling regulation.”

Stan Pridham, the owner of the company, filed a complaint with the NNC stating concern about the headline of the article and the accuracy of the reported statements. He argued that the article was biased in that it was impossible to comply with the regulations in question. In particular, he said that the quote used in the headline was taken out of context and pointed to a number of statements in the article that he said were false and showed bias in favour of the ministry.

The complainant also took issue with the fact that he was not given an opportunity to comment on the matter prior to publication, and argued that the piece damaged his company’s reputation.

The news organization responded to the concerns raised and updated the article with a statement from the complainant, including his view that it is impossible for his company to comply with the province’s recycling regulations.

In its response to the complaint, the news organization stated that the story was about an administrative penalty against the company and was based on a public finding released by the B.C. Ministry of the Environment.

The news organization noted that the statements in question are based on the language and content in the public document. In particular, the news organization referred to the specific section in the ministry’s final determination which noted that the company “continuously displayed no indication of future compliance while willfully violating the Regulation without any demonstrated willingness to meet the regulatory requirements, as indicated by its President in emails, ‘I’ll be going to jail before I comply.’”

The news organization stated that the article was not an exploration of the legitimacy of the province's recycling policies, but was instead a news report on a fine that was levied on the company.

The complainant responded by reiterating that it was impossible to comply with the regulations in question and that the article was based on inaccurate information contained in the ministry's decision.

In reviewing the specific allegations of inaccuracy, the NNC observed that the statements reflected the content of the ministry's decision against the company. In this case, the NNC agreed with the news organization that the comment reflected in the headline is supported by the document in question, which noted that the comment was made by the company's president in emails.

In its review, the NNC observed that the article reports that the company has 13 locations in multiple provinces. While this appears to reflect the information contained in the ministry's finding at the time, the complainant pointed out that the company in fact has 14 locations. It is the view of the NNC that this points to the importance of fact-checking even minor details and consulting multiple sources. At the same time, the NNC finds that this detail does not mislead readers on the substance of the article, which reports on an administrative finding.

While the NNC agrees with the complainant that the news organization could have reached out to the company prior to publication, generally speaking, reporting on public decisions and findings may not warrant an opportunity for response in all cases. That said, it was Council's view that had the news organization offered an opportunity to comment prior to publication, the complainant's concerns may have been addressed at an early stage in the reporting process and a complaint may have been avoided.

The NNC has consistently held that journalists are free to choose the scope of a story and to select sources that they deem credible. While the NNC cautions members against publication of single-sourced news stories, the purpose of the article, in this case, was to report on an administrative penalty issued by a government body and was not intended to provide a deep analysis of the recycling regulations or their impact.

For the reasons outlined above, Council found the matter resolved due to corrective action.