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Fl Appellate Court Rules Media Can Legally Lie

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On February 14, a Florida Appeals court ruled there is absolutely nothing illegal about lying, concealing or distorting information by a major press organization. The court reversed the \$425,000 jury verdict in favor of journalist Jane Akre who charged she was pressured by Fox Television management and lawyers to air what she knew and documented to be false information. The ruling basically declares it is technically not against any law, rule, or regulation to deliberately lie or distort the news on a television broadcast.

On August 18, 2000, a six-person jury was unanimous in its conclusion that Akre was indeed fired for threatening to report the station's pressure to broadcast what jurors decided was "a false, distorted, or slanted" story about the widespread use of growth hormone in dairy cows. The court did not dispute the heart of Akre's claim, that Fox pressured her to broadcast a false story to protect the broadcaster from having to defend the truth in court, as well as suffer the ire of irate advertisers.

Fox argued from the first, and failed on three separate occasions, in front of three different judges, to have the case tossed out on the grounds there is no hard, fast, and written rule against deliberate distortion of the news. The attorneys for Fox, owned by media baron Rupert Murdoch, argued the First

Amendment gives broadcasters the right to lie or deliberately distort news reports on the public airwaves.

In its six-page written decision, the Court of Appeals held that the Federal Communications Commission position against news distortion is only a "policy," not a promulgated law, rule, or regulation.

Fox aired a report after the ruling saying it was "totally vindicated" by the verdict.

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