Entertainment - AP

TV Stations Cancel 'Saving Private Ryan'

By LEON DROUIN KEITH, Associated Press Writer

NEW YORK - Several ABC affiliates have announced that they won't take part in the network's Veterans Day airing of "Saving Private Ryan," saying the acclaimed film's violence and language could draw sanctions from the Federal Communications Commission (news - web sites).

Stations replacing the movie with other programming Thursday include Cox Television-owned stations in Atlanta and Charlotte, N.C., three Midwest stations owned by Citadel Communications.

"Under strict interpretation of the rules, we can't run that programming before 10 p.m.," said Ray Cole, president of Citadel, which owns WOI-TV in Des Moines, KCAU-TV in Sioux City and KLKN-TV in Lincoln, Neb.

The Oscar-winning film includes a violent depiction of the D-Day invasion and profanity.

"We have attempted to get an advanced waiver from the FCC (news - web sites) and, remarkably to me, they are not willing to do so," Cole told The Des Moines Register.

In a statement on the Web site of Atlanta's WSB-TV, the station's vice president and general manager, Greg Stone cited a March ruling in which the FCC said an expletive uttered by rock star Bono during NBC's live airing of the 2003 Golden Globe Awards (news - web sites) was both indecent and profane.

The agency made it clear then that virtually any use of the F-word — which is used in "Saving Private Ryan" — was inappropriate for over-the-air radio and television.

The Bono case "reversed years of prior policy that the context of language matters," Stone said. He added that broadcaster could not get any clarification from the FCC on whether the movie...
violates the standard.

Other stations that decided not to air the movie include WGNO-TV of New Orleans, owned by Tribune Broadcasting Corp., and WMUR-TV of Manchester, N.H., owned by Hearst-Argyle Television Inc.

ABC, which broadcast the film uncut in 2001 and 2002, issued a statement saying it is proud to broadcast it again. The network's contract with director Steven Spielberg stipulates that the film cannot be edited.

"As in the past, this broadcast will contain appropriate and clear advisories and parental guidelines," the statement said.

Several stations said ABC had rejected their requests to air the movie after 10 p.m.

An FCC spokeswoman said Wednesday that the agency does not monitor television broadcasts, but responds to complaints. The agency did receive a complaint after the 2001 broadcast of "Saving Private Ryan," but it was denied, she said.

WSOC-TV of Charlotte said it had received complaints about language in the movie when it was aired in 2001 and 2002.

"Now, after much concern and discussion about family viewing over past months, and with Americans at war across the world, it is the vivid depiction of violence combined with graphic language proposed to begin airing at 8 p.m. that has forced our decision," said Lee Armstrong, the station's vice president and general manager.

ABC has told its affiliates it would cover any fines, but Cole, of Citadel, said the network could not protect its affiliates against other FCC sanctions.

The FCC has stepped up enforcement of its decency standards for certain content following this year's Super Bowl halftime show, in which one of Janet Jackson's breasts was exposed.

Profane speech, which is barred from broadcast radio and television between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m., is defined by the FCC as language that is "so grossly offensive to members of the public who actually hear it as to amount to a nuisance," or epithets that tend "to provoke violent resentment."

The guidelines say the context in which such material appears is of critical importance.

Cole cited recent FCC actions and last week's re-election of President Bush (news - web sites) as reasons for replacing "Saving Private Ryan" on Thursday with a music program and the TV movie "Return to Mayberry."

"We're just coming off an election where moral issues were cited as a reason by people voting one way or another and, in my opinion, the commissioners are fearful of the new Congress," Cole said.

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