



Abortion Rights
Coalition of Canada

Your Voice for Choice

Coalition pour le droit à
l'avortement au Canada

Canada's only national political pro-choice advocacy group

POB 2663, Station Main, Vancouver, BC, V6B 3W3 • info@arcc-cdac.ca • www.arcc-cdac.ca

August 1, 2012

Western Fair District
P.O. Box 7550
London, Ontario N5Y 5P8
showsales@westernfairdistrict.com
bsayler@westernfairdistrict.com

Dear Exhibit Sales and Beth Sayler,

Several supporters have notified us that a "right to life" group that opposes safe and legal abortion for women has been allowed to host an inappropriate exhibit at the Western Fair for the last 40 years.

We are writing to ask you to please cancel this group's contract for an exhibit booth at your fair, because the exhibit appears to directly violate several clauses in your Rules and Regulations (www.westernfairdistrict.com/docs/pdf/fair/RulesandRegulations.pdf). In addition, the exhibit also offends the spirit of a family fair, exploits and manipulates children, negates the right to privacy of parents, abuses the trust of parents, presents one-sided propaganda, and promotes discrimination against women.

Section 10 of your Rules and Regulations states:

"Exhibit space will be allotted only to legitimate businesses, manufacturers or their duly authorized agents. Only the products as specified on the space contract form may be shown, sold or exhibited. **No articles which are offensive by reason of their odour, sound or appearance or which are dangerous by reason of their combustible or explosive character will be accepted or admitted.** If any such be admitted through misapprehension on acceptance or otherwise, they shall be removed by order of the General Manager."

Anti-abortion groups are not businesses or manufacturers and do not sell products (except perhaps in a minor incidental way). They are non-profit groups or charities that espouse a political or religious view, namely to persuade people that abortion is wrong and should be opposed and even criminalized. Although it is their right to hold and publicize such views, this controversial political view has no place at a family fair amongst commercial exhibitors selling personal and household goods. Your customers do not tour your fair exhibits to be preached to on a political issue, they do so strictly for entertainment purposes – to enjoy browsing, shopping, and eating treats in a family-friendly environment. To be unexpectedly confronted with an exhibit on a political topic that is also highly emotional and divisive does a serious disservice to your patrons and to the reputation of the Western Fair itself.

Our understanding is that the display has, at least in the past, exhibited graphic displays of aborted fetuses in view of unsuspecting children and families passing by. It should go without saying that this is extremely inappropriate and an obvious violation of your policy against displaying offensive articles. Unless this aspect of your policy is brand new, it means that the Western Fair has been flouting its own policy for many years in order to cater to an anti-abortion group, a highly objectionable situation.

Section 17 of your Rules and Regulations states:

“Undue noise made in the operation of exhibits, or noisy, unseemly or unethical methods employed in sales or demonstration activities will not be tolerated. All exhibitors must have an equal opportunity to conduct their own demonstrations without interference from their neighbours. The decision of what constitutes undue noise, unseemly or unethical methods shall rest with the General Manager, whose decision shall be final.”

Again, displaying graphically shocking materials in full view of children and families is, without question, highly unseemly and unethical. Even if the anti-abortion group no longer displays pictures of aborted fetuses, our supporters have told us that the exhibitors entice children to come over to their booth by displaying fetal development models. They talk to the children about what they mean, and give them fetus figurines to take home. In our view, such tactics exploit the innocence of children and manipulate impressionable minds. Children would most likely approach the booth assuming that the fetus models are toy dolls. They are not old enough to understand the moral complexities of the abortion debate, and could become upset and alarmed, especially when swayed by the irresponsible “shock tactics” that anti-abortion groups frequently engage in.

Moreover, in a busy fair environment, parents would have little or no warning or ability to prevent their children from being exposed to the exhibit and engaging with booth staff. In fact, since parents would trust that everything at the Western Fair is family-friendly and safe, they probably often allow older children (e.g., age 8-10 and up) to tour the fair on their own. This creates an improper situation in which the fair is giving the “right to life” exhibitor near-unsupervised access to impressionable children and allowing the emotional manipulation of children, while at the same time abusing the trust of parents and negating their right of privacy in terms of shielding their young children from emotionally-charged issues. Even though your policy states in bold terms that such unseemly and unethical methods will not be tolerated, that appears to be exactly what you have been doing.

Protecting children is such an important objective in our society that the Supreme Court of Canada has consistently ruled that fundamental freedoms can be limited in order to protect children, under our *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. For example, in *R v Sharpe* (<http://scc.lexum.org/en/2001/2001scc2/2001scc2.html>), the court upheld child pornography laws despite recognizing that it limits freedom of expression. In *Irwin Toy v Quebec* (<http://scc.lexum.org/en/1989/1989scr1-927/1989scr1-927.html>), the court upheld a ban on advertising aimed at children even though it infringes freedom of expression. In addition, Canadian broadcast standards and movie rating systems are structured and enforced mostly to protect children from inappropriate, offensive, and violent imagery.

The “right to life” exhibit is essentially advertising that is directed at children, which makes it not only inappropriate, but probably illegal under advertising codes. The Canadian Advertising Standards Code states, under Section 12, *Advertising to Children* (www.adstandards.com/en/standards/canCodeOfAdStandards.aspx):

“Advertising that is directed to children must not exploit their credulity, lack of experience or their sense of loyalty, and must not present information or illustrations that might result in their physical, emotional or moral harm.”

We understand that after previous complaints, the Western Fair responded by moving the anti-abortion booth away from the Kiddieland entrance, as well as apparently asking the exhibitors to modify their display. First, it beggars belief that the exhibit was ever allowed near the Kiddieland entrance to begin with, because that would imply that the Western Fair has been officially sanctioning the targeted exploitation of children for upwards of 40 years. Second, simply moving the booth away from an area with a large concentration of children is no answer to the complaint, since children are everywhere at the fair and make up a significant component of your customer base. Since the booth would have easy access to children regardless of its location, it is unacceptable for it to be anywhere at the fair.

Although we're not sure exactly what information the "right to life" booth is imparting to children and others, our experience is that virtually all anti-abortion groups spread harmful misinformation about abortion. For example, they claim that abortion is dangerous to women because it leads to a higher risk of breast cancer, infertility, subsequent premature birth, psychological trauma, and other serious problems. None of these claims have any scientific merit, yet anti-abortion groups continue to spread such propaganda because it is a matter of religious belief for them. In addition, they present only one side of the issue, with no opportunity for anyone to consider the pro-choice viewpoint, or even understand the reasons why women might seek abortions. The anti-abortion view tends to trivialize and unfairly condemn the difficult process that women go through in choosing and accessing abortions. There is no reason to believe that the "right to life" group at the Western Fair is refraining from such negative and misleading tactics.

Abortion is legal in Canada, it has been deemed a medically required service under the *Canada Health Act*, it is a protected right for women under Charter case law, and we all have a right of choice when it comes to seeking or receiving medical care. In other words, "pro-choice" is the democratic law of the land, while "right to life" groups oppose current laws in Canada and work to change them, even though that would endanger women's lives and rights via forced motherhood or clandestine unsafe abortion. This makes the presence of an anti-abortion exhibit at the fair doubly inappropriate, because the views and agenda underlying it are discriminatory. Given the high likelihood that the exhibitors are spreading harmful misinformation about abortion and would refuse to admit as much, given that the exhibit is biased and one-sided with no alternative views available, and given that the exhibit's agenda supports a radical change in democratic law that would discriminate against women, the only reasonable and responsible solution is to ban the exhibit entirely.

In light of the foregoing, we ask you to please revoke the contract of the "right to life" group immediately, and permanently ban them from the fair. In addition, we ask that you do not allow this or any other anti-abortion group to have an exhibit at the fair in the future.

Thank you very much for your consideration and cooperation. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Joyce Arthur
Executive Director
Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada
604-351-0867
joyce@arcc-cdac.ca