

# CARU<sup>®</sup> NEWS

Immediate Release

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## **MILLS ONLINE PARTICIPATES IN CARU FORUM**

### ***CARU Recommends General Mills Subsidiary Modify Placement of Privacy-Policy Link***

*New York, NY – February 15, 2006* – The Children’s Advertising Review Unit has recommended that Mills Online, a General Mills subsidiary and operator of the Millsberry Website, modify placement of the Website privacy-policy link to assure it is clearly visible to children. The company has agreed to do so.

The Website came to CARU’s attention through CARU’s routine monitoring of the Internet. CARU monitors Websites for compliance with its *Self-Regulatory Guidelines for Children’s Advertising* (the *Guidelines*) and the federal Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA).

The Millsberry Website is an online community that offers online games and activities to children and other users. A user is encouraged to sign up and actively participate to accumulate points for use on the Website. The homepage of the Website is presented as a local newspaper offering news, events, tips and a “Sign Up” link.

CARU was initially concerned about whether the Website collected personally identifiable information (PII), in the form of an email address, without first notifying parents and obtaining verifiable parental consent. In addition CARU was concerned that the link to the site’s privacy policy on the homepage and registration page were not prominent.

In response, the company demonstrated that its registration process complies with the CARU Guidelines and COPPA. The company said also that although its registration page informs users that email addresses are not retained, it would clarify the statement to read, “...Your email address is used to send one message confirming your registration and then is deleted...”

Regarding the site’s privacy policy, CARU’s *Guidelines* on Interactive Electronic Media require that the link to the policy should be clear, prominent and readily accessible on the Website homepage and at the point of information collection. When CARU first reviewed the site, a user could easily overlook the link which could only be seen by scrolling down to the bottom of the page. To meet CARU’s *Guidelines*, a material disclosure must be apparent in the page as it normally appears on the computer screen, without the need for scrolling.

Following its review of the site, CARU found the Millsberry registration mechanism compliant because it met the standards set by CARU’s *Guidelines* and COPPA through COPPA’s one-time use exception for the collection of an email address from children

under 13 when needed to respond to a user's request. CARU determined that the Operator's link to its privacy policy was not compliant with the *Guidelines* because it was not prominent or readily accessible to a user prior to registration.

General Mills, in its advertiser's statement, said it is pleased that CARU "agrees that our Millsberry.com registration process fully complies with COPPA and CARU's *Guidelines*."

"And while we feel that the current placement of the link to Millsberry's Privacy Policy on the registration page is prominent and readily accessible to users (and therefore complies with CARU's *Guidelines*), we will add an additional link near the top of the page," the company said.

***For a copy of the decision or for press inquiries, please contact Linda Bean, Director of Communications, 212-705-0129.***

CARU's inquiry was conducted under *NAD/CARU/NARB Procedures for the Voluntary Self-Regulation of National Advertising*. Details of the initial inquiry, CARU's decision, and the advertiser's response will be included in the next edition of the *NAD/CARU Case Report*.

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The National Advertising Review Council (NARC) was formed in 1971 by the Association of National Advertisers, Inc. (ANA), the American Association of Advertising Agencies, Inc. (AAAA), the American Advertising Federation, Inc. (AAF), and the Council of Better Business Bureaus, Inc. (CBBB). Its purpose is to foster truth and accuracy in national advertising through voluntary self-regulation. NARC is the body that establishes the policies and procedures for the CBBB's National Advertising Division (NAD) and Children's Advertising Review Unit (CARU), as well as for the National Advertising Review Board (NARB) and Electronic Retailing Self-Regulation Program (ERSP).

NAD and CARU are the investigative arms of the advertising industry's voluntary self-regulation program. Their casework results from competitive challenges from other advertisers, and also from self-monitoring traditional and new media. The National Advertising Review Board (NARB), the appeals body, is a peer group from which ad-hoc panels are selected to adjudicate those cases that are not resolved at the NAD/CARU level. This unique, self-regulatory system is funded entirely by the business community; CARU is financed by the children's advertising industry, while NAD/NARC/NARB's sole source of funding is derived from membership fees paid to the CBBB. Funding for ERSP is derived from membership fees paid to the Electronic Retailing Association. For more information about advertising self regulation, please visit [www.narcpartners.org](http://www.narcpartners.org).