

I write as a member of the public to say that I am horrified by the proposal that product placement be permitted in commercial television programmes. It will expose children (and others) to all kinds of wrong messages at a time when, for example, there is widespread concern about the general state of children's health. But it is also wrong because clear advertisement breaks at least allow people to understand (and for parents to teach their children) that what follows is a hard commercial sell when the possible undesirable effects of a product are unlikely to be mentioned. Product placement is intended to make things seem desirable; it can be very difficult for children (and, again, others), who are already bombarded with messages to 'want, want, want; buy, buy, buy', not to be influenced. Children watch many programmes outside the periods designated as children's television; product placement should not be allowed at any time. There may be problems for commercial television stations to attract television advertising, but any step to allow product placement of any kind would be a disgraceful failure by government and other bodies to protect us all from commercial exploitation. I believe that we have a right not to be subjected to what are likely to be close-to-subliminal messages. It also concerns me that the existence of commercials may already have some effect, conscious or otherwise, on the content of programmes ('we don't want to upset commercial interests'); the adoption of product placement is likely to increase this possibility. I hope that the government will abandon this plan, to which there appears to be widespread opposition (except, no doubt, from those it is likely to benefit financially). Do the right thing.

John Churchman.