

Libel

The broadcasting of any defamatory, racist, sexually explicit or similar material will result in immediate suspension from station activities until a full hearing by the Programming Committee. If a guest oversteps the line with comments you must bring it to the management's attention immediately.

A defamatory statement is one which tends to lower the reputation of the subject in the eyes of right-thinking people.

No intention to defame is required. It can be made by 'any means' including by letter, email, press release, social media posting, telephone, website or other Internet posting and radio broadcast. A defamatory statement made on radio is called libel.

Everyone involved in the defamatory statement is liable to be sued – the presenter, the producer, the contributor, the interviewee, the station, the members. If a radio show repeats a defamatory statement by way of the morning newspaper review it could be held to account – whether or not the newspaper is sued. A simple slip of the tongue could result in the closure of the station.

Blasphemy is described in the 2009 Act as the 'publication or utterance of matter that is grossly abusive or insulting in relation to matters held sacred by any religion, thereby causing outrage among a substantial number of the adherents of that religion'. The broadcasting of blasphemous material can result in a fine subject to a maximum of €25,000.

Avoiding Libel

Using the word 'allegedly' is not a defence. It could make it worse.

A comment can be libellous even if the person has an immediate right to reply.

Be careful when inviting guests on your show – have they been well prepared and do you know what they are going to say?

Satire can be defamatory.

Be extremely careful when reading out texts, emails or social media messages – read the content in full before deciding if it is okay to broadcast.

Ensure you have researched your topic adequately and carefully.

Check the sources of your primary data are absolutely true and correct – do not use rumours.

If you are unsure about anything, speak to the station manager.

Don't take quotes or sayings out of context.

And the most important rule is

'If in doubt, leave it out!'