

Cell firms threaten to put antennas only in poor areas

By Eran Gabay

If Israel's cellular carriers are forced to fully indemnify municipalities for the drop in property values caused by proximity to cellular antennas, then there are obviously going to be fewer antennas, warned the CEO of one carrier in a conversation with TheMarker.

That means that the radiation emitted by cell phones will actually increase, he said.

Moreover, the CEO said, the companies will simply build their antennas in low income neighborhoods. "You can understand for yourself that we aren't talking about areas where rich people live," he added.

The Forum of Cellular Companies, a body that comprises Israel's three main cellular carriers - Pelephone Communications, Partner Communications and Cellcom - is handling the companies' response to the indemnification demand.

They have already spent NIS 10 million over the last year convincing the public that there is no danger in cellular telephone radiation, and are planning on at least doubling that amount next year. Part of this money, the companies decided, will be used to establish a national visitors center about the cellular industry.

And the effort seems to be paying off: Recent surveys that the forum commissioned have shown a decrease in the public's worries about cellular radiation.

Two weeks ago, the forum scheduled a meeting with the Education Ministry to discuss how to explain properly to teachers, parents and students that placing an antenna at a school **would actually significantly reduce the radiation emitted by the students' cell phones.** The companies argue that the more antennas there are in a given area, the less powerful they need to be, and thus the lower the radiation produced by the cell phone.

The CEO of the cellular operator confirmed that the topic of antennas at schools arose at the forum. The forum also intends to try to recruit the Environment Ministry's support for its position, in order to show that its position is not based solely on commercial considerations.

Yesterday, TheMarker reported that the effort to set the level of indemnification for decreases in property values is stuck fast, as none of the parties involved is actually interested in making progress at this time. Currently, cellular operators are required to provide 100 percent indemnification.

There are now about 6,700 cellular antennas in Israel, and Pelephone's decision to build a third-generation network will mean the addition of 700 more.