

More bad news on the dangers of using cellphones

By Stuart Corner

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A massive study in the UK into the possible health effects of radiation from cellphones has been unable to rule them safe in the long term, and another international study has concluded that what are presently considered to be acceptable exposure levels to radio waves of all frequencies are too high and should be lowered.

The largest UK investigation into possible health problems from mobile technology found no evidence that short-term mobile phone use affected brain function or could cause brain cancer. However professor Lawrie Challis, chairman of the £8.8 million (\$21.2m) Mobile Telecommunications and Health Research (MTHR) Programme, was reported saying that studies so far had included few participants who had used mobile phones for 10 years or longer. "We cannot rule out the possibility at this stage that cancer could appear in a few years' time," said. "Most cancers take 10 years to appear."

Despite the inconclusive outcome of the long term effects, Chris Althaus, CEO of the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (AMTA) said Mobile phone users would be reassured about their safety as a result of the study.

They are likely to be far less reassured by the conclusions of the [BioInitiative Working Group](#), an international working group of scientists, researchers and public health policy professionals which has just released its report on electromagnetic fields (EMF) and health. It raises serious concern about the safety of existing public limits that regulate how much EMF is allowable from power lines, cellphones, and many other sources of EMF exposure in daily life.

The group has not itself undertaken any research to compile the report: rather it has reviewed existing research on the subject to arrive at its conclusions with the aim being "to assess scientific evidence on health impacts from electromagnetic radiation below current public exposure limits and evaluate what changes in these limits are warranted now to reduce possible public health risks in the future."

One of its, rather chilling, conclusions is that "There may be no lower limit at which exposures do not affect us. Until we know if there is a lower limit below which bioeffects and adverse health impacts do not occur, it is unwise from a public health perspective to continue 'business-as-usual' deploying new technologies that increase ELF and RF exposures, particularly involuntary exposures."

The report claims to provide "detailed scientific information on health impacts when people are exposed to electromagnetic radiation hundreds or even thousands of times below limits currently established by the Federal Communications Commission (US FCC) and International Commission for Non-Ionising Radiation Protection in Europe (ICNIRP)."

The authors say they reviewed more than 2000 scientific studies and reviews, and concluded that the existing public safety limits are inadequate to protect public health." From a public health policy standpoint, new public safety limits, and limits on further deployment of risky technologies are warranted based on the total weigh of evidence."

The report documents scientific evidence raising worries about childhood leukaemia (from power lines and other electrical exposures), brain tumours and acoustic neuromas (from cell and cordless phones) and Alzheimer's disease. It finds evidence that EMF is a risk factor for both childhood and adult cancers.

The co-editor of the report, Dr David Carpenter, rector, Institute for Health and the Environment at the University of Albany, New York says "this report stands as a wake-up call that long-term exposure to some kinds of EMF may cause serious health effects. Good public health planning is needed now to

prevent cancers and neurological diseases linked to exposure to power lines and other sources of EMF.

We need to educate people and our decision-makers that 'business as usual' is unacceptable." Brain tumour specialist Dr. Lennart Hardell, professor at University Hospital in Orebro, Sweden, said "the evidence for risks from prolonged cellphone and cordless phone use is quite strong when you look at people who have used these devices for 10 years or longer, and when they are used mainly on one side of the head."

Brain tumours normally take a long time to develop, on the order of 15 to 20 years. But there is some evidence that brain tumours and acoustic neuromas (tumour of the auditory nerve in the brain) and are showing up after only 10 years (a shorter time period than for most other known carcinogens). "This indicates we need research on more long-term users to understand the full risks" said Hardell. "Recent studies that do not report increased risk of brain tumours and acoustic neuromas have not looked at heavy users, use over ten years or longer, and do not look at the part of the brain which would reasonably have exposure to produce a tumour."

The full report is available at <http://www.bioinitiative.org>