

## Electrosensitive refugees from wireless technology head for Drôme

Charles Bremner in Valence, France

An unlikely band of fugitives has found refuge in the wilds of the Drôme valley in southern France.

Living in strange metal-shielded caravans at a secret woodland site, they are fleeing neither the police nor the world at large, but radio waves.

The residents of France's first electromagnetic "refuge zone" have come to find a haven from the invisible pollution of modern life that they say has blighted their lives.



Anny Boury wraps up in a metal-fibre shawl to shield herself from EMF. Claudie, in aluminium cape, says microwaves "excite the brain, like nicotine"

PHOTO MAGALI DELPORTE FOR THE TIMES

They are among a growing band of "electro-sensitives" — people who say they are physically tormented by modern wireless technology used in telephones, wi-fi devices and dozens of other sources.

Most say that they experience regular physical pain as a result. "It's the scandal of our time, like asbestos was before its danger was discovered," said Serge Sargentini, a retired army officer who heads Next-Up, a campaigning network that opened the site near Valence last month for those who feel they are victims of the electromagnetic field (EMF).

An expansive Corsican, Mr Sargentini and his allies in Europe and the US say that after years of denial and mockery, the world is beginning to understand that devastation is being wrought by "electrosmog". Legislators in Switzerland and Sweden are seeking new limits on emissions and the creation of low radiation "white zones" to give respite to sufferers. France is moving to restrict mobile phone use by children, with Paris switching off wi-fi in libraries. In landmark cases, two courts have ordered phone operators to dismantle masts near homes.

The electro-sensitives accuse "negationists" of stifling research into electro-ailments that range, they say, from cancer and Alzheimer's to migraines, nausea and stress. "There will be a Nüremberg moment," said Mr Sargentini, who worked with military radar before his conversion. "All those who hid the truth from the people will have to give account before justice."

As much as 8 per cent of the population suffer but most do not realise it, say campaigners. Most are women.

The Next-Up refuge has been assailed by applications for its half-dozen rotating places since word of its existence reached the media.

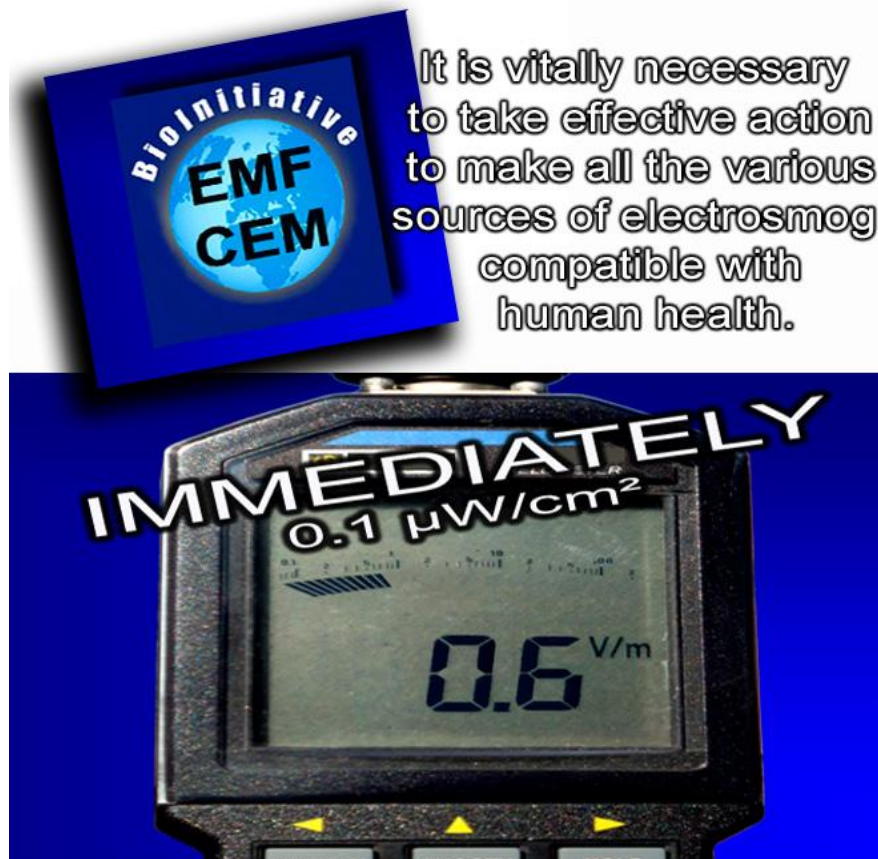
This week's residents, weary of being sent to psychiatrists or neurologists, described their relief when they realised that their ailments were caused by toxic waves. Anny Boury, 48, a press officer, described the misery of proximity to phones. "When someone in a train telephones behind me, I feel it like being

stabbed in the back,” she said. She sports an elegant net shawl that contains metal fibres to help to shield her from the ever-present EMF.

Cindy, 39, a photographer from California, said she had travelled to France because the authorities were ahead of the US in beginning to understand electro-sensitivity. Claudie, 55, a primary school teacher, said that microwaves excited the brain like nicotine. “People don’t want to admit it because they do not want to give up their fix.” She is unable to take trains, and drives only at night. “I can feel the masts before I see them,” she said.

Oddly, trains are very close to the refuge. The Mediterranean express flashes by through a tunnel directly below — but Next-Up is already working towards a completely wave-free village in an even quieter spot.

- Tests done on people who claim to be electro-sensitive have repeatedly shown that they cannot tell whether they are being exposed to genuine or sham electronic fields. Researchers have suggested that they suffer instead from psychosomatic conditions such as chronic pain and types of tinnitus
- The Interphone study into the health impact of mobile phones, carried out by the WHO from 2000-06, cost \$30 million (£18 million) and involved 50 scientists and 14,000 research subjects. The results have not yet been released but the methodology has been criticised
- A 2005 study of mobile phone users concluded that the risk of cancer was not increased in the first ten years of using a mobile phone. Scientists advised limiting mobile phone use anyway, especially among children, as a precaution
- French communities have repeatedly protested against mobile phone masts and campaigned against wireless internet
- In Britain, Powerwatch continues to insist that electromagnetic signals are damaging to health
- Last year Ronald Herberman, director of the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute, sent a memo to his 3,000 staff urging them to limit their use of mobile phones, basing his warnings on “early unpublished data” — thought to be from the Interphone study.



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