

# Avoiding potential risks of electromagnetic fields



Public health - 02-04-2009 - 12:34

Antennas, mobile phone masts and other electromagnetic emitting devices should be set within a specific distance from schools and health institutions, according to a report adopted by the European Parliament. The Commission should make more reliable information available about the effects of exposure to electromagnetic fields to citizens who feel that they are not well informed. The report was adopted with 559 votes in favour, 22 against and 8 abstentions.

The report acknowledges the wide use of wireless technologies and other electromagnetic emitting technologies and their benefits to society, but also raises concerns over their "continuing uncertainties about possible health risks." In particular, there are concerns about the exposure of children and young people to electromagnetic fields. Therefore, MEPs call for stricter regulation and protection for residents and consumers.

## **Better protection for EU citizens through "optimal placement of devices"**

The report, drafted by Frédérique RIES (ALDE, BE), notes that industry stakeholders can already influence a number of safety factors, including the direction of the transmitting antenna in relation to living spaces, and the distance between the site and the transmitter. Industry actors are being encouraged to use this power to give better protection to people living nearby, and to prevent a "proliferation of poorly positioned masts and transmitters."

The placement of antennas, mobile phone masts and high-voltage power lines should be negotiated between industry actors, public authorities and residents' associations in order to minimise health risks and legal action cases. This will also ensure that EMF-transmitting devices are kept clear of schools, crèches, retirement homes and health care institutions. In addition to this, the House recommends that mobile telephone operators should negotiate to share infrastructure in order to reduce "the exposure of the public to EMFs."

## **Increased access to reliable information**

A recently published Eurobarometer study suggests that "the majority of citizens do not feel that the public authorities inform them adequately on measures to protect them from EMFs." In light of this, the report makes a number of suggestions to improve EU citizen's access to reliable information. These suggestions include making maps available on the internet, which show areas of exposure to EMF transmitting devices. In conjunction with this, the Commission should produce a yearly report on the "level of electromagnetic radiation in the EU" and its sources.

MEPs also call for an improvement to consumer information, by amending the technical standards of the European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardisation to impose labelling requirements, which would show the transmitting power of every wireless-operated device.

## **Review of EMF limits and Interphone findings**

The Commission is urged to review "the scientific basis and adequacy of the EMF limits as laid down in Recommendation 1999/519/EC" and to then report back to Parliament. This is in light of the fact that many member states have voluntarily introduced much stricter regulations than are required by the EU.

The report also refers to the Interphone study, which began in 2000, and which is a wide ranging scientific project to look into the links between mobile phones and certain types of cancer, including brain, auditory and parotid gland tumours. The results have been expected since 2006, but have been repeatedly postponed. The European Parliament is particularly concerned by the "appeal for caution" from Elisabeth Cardis, the coordinator of the Interphone study, that "as far as children are concerned, mobile phones should not be used beyond reasonable limits."

The report therefore calls on the Commission, who has made significant financial contributions towards this study, to ask those who are in charge of the project "why no definitive findings have been published." Parliament and Member States should be informed without delay if a response is given.

## **Children and young people**

Children and young people aged 10 to 20 are amongst the highest users of mobile phones, which is of concern to the House as there are uncertainties remaining about the possible health risks, "particularly to young people whose brains are still developing." The report suggests that in order to raise awareness of the dangers of mobile phones, and to encourage good mobile phone techniques, such as using hands-free kits, keeping calls short and switching off phones, that "the Community funding earmarked for studies on EMFs be partly switched to finance" an awareness raising campaign.

Aggressive marketing campaigns by telephone operators, including "the sale of mobile phones designed solely for children or free call time packages aimed at teenagers" are also condemned by MEPs.