

Cellphones Harming your Health?

A new study ascertains whether there are any health issues like sleep disorders or cancer linked to using mobile phones

By Rudolph Muller - April 26, 2010



The debate surrounding the impact of wireless communication networks on human health has become a hot topic in South Africa. This topic was thrust into the lime light when iBurst erected a tower in Craigavon close to residential properties.

According to Tracey-Lee Dorny from the newly formed Electromagnetic Radiation Research Foundation (ERRF), numerous Craigavon residents have reported radiation related illnesses since the tower went live in mid-2009.

Dorny also organized local discussions with Barrie Trower, a retired British military intelligence scientist who worked in microwave and stealth warfare, who claims “for 60 years, very low-level microwaves have been used by governments as stealth weapons to cause mental disorders in dissidents.”

Trower further warns against a wide range of electromagnetic radiation, including that from cellular towers and Wi-Fi hotspots. “He [Trower] has investigated many cancer and suicide clusters around masts, and has strongly linked these to microwave radiation,” the ERRF said in a press statement.

In a recent interview on Radio 702 Trower said that no mobile transmitter – hence a cellphone tower – should be within a kilometer and a half of a school, adding that there is no reason for microwave transmitters to be near people.

Trower further advised people with a base station on their building to place aluminum tin between them and the roof, with “the shiny side to the roof”.

Dubious research

The research used by Trower to substantiate his claims, which includes the ‘Bio-Initiative Report’, is widely disputed in the scientific world.

According to the COMAR committee of the IEEE, “A major weakness of the BIR is a selective, rather than a comprehensive, review of the literature in various topical areas.”

EMF-NET, a scientific consortium of 41 participants funded by the European Commission to investigate the issue of EMF (Electromagnetic Frequency) and health, has found no significant link

between EMF and health. This organisation also essentially dismisses the validity of the Bio-Initiative Report.

Other scientific organizations, including the Health Council of the Netherlands, the Australian Centre for Radiofrequency Bio-effects Research and the Electric Power Research Institute have also questioned the validity of the Bio-Initiative Report.

True in-depth research

A new study has now been launched to establish whether there are in fact health concerns related to mobile phone usage. The UK COSMOS study aims to carry out long term health monitoring of a large group of people to identify if there are health issues linked to long term mobile phone use.

The most recent report from the Mobile Telecommunications and Health Research Programme (MTHR) concluded that short term (less than ten years) exposure to mobile phone emissions is not associated with an increase in brain and nervous system cancers.

There are however still significant uncertainties that can only be resolved by monitoring the health of a large cohort of phone users over a long period of time, and this is what the COSMOS study will now try to establish.

“The Committee is convinced that the best way to address these uncertainties is to carry out a large cohort study of mobile phone users, an approach that has also been rated as a high priority by the World Health Organisation,” COSMOS said.

“We will be looking at any changes in the frequency of specific symptoms over time, such as headaches and sleep disorders, and also the risks of cancers, benign tumours, neurological and cerebro-vascular diseases.”

The UK cohort will follow the health of approximately 100,000 mobile phone users (18+ years of age) for 20 to 30 years. The international cohort will follow the health of approximately 250,000 European mobile phone users.

The study in the UK is funded by the MTHR, an independent programme of research into mobile phones and health that is jointly supported by the Department of Health and Industry.