

Thursday 2 April 2009

Health concerns associated with electromagnetic fields

P6_TA(2009)0216

European Parliament resolution of 2 April 2009 on health concerns associated with electromagnetic fields (2008/2211(INI))

(2010/C 137 E/08)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 137, 152, and 174 of the EC Treaty, seeking to promote a high level of human health, environmental protection and workers' health and safety protection,
 - having regard to Council Recommendation 1999/519/EC of 12 July 1999 on the limitation of exposure of the general public to electromagnetic fields (0 Hz to 300 GHz) ⁽¹⁾ and the related Commission implementation report of 1 September 2008 on the implementation of that recommendation (COM(2008)0532),
 - having regard to Directive 2004/40/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on the minimum health and safety requirements regarding exposure of workers to the risks arising from physical agents (electromagnetic fields) ⁽²⁾,
 - having regard to Directive 1999/5/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 1999 on radio equipment and telecommunications terminal equipment and the mutual recognition of their conformity ⁽³⁾ and to the respective harmonised safety standards for mobile phones and base stations,
 - having regard to Directive 2006/95/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2006 on the harmonisation of the laws of Member States relating to electrical equipment designed for use within certain voltage limits ⁽⁴⁾,
 - having regard to its resolution of 4 September 2008 on the mid-term review of the European Environment and Health Action Plan 2004-2010 ⁽⁵⁾,
 - having regard to its position of 10 March 1999 on the proposal for a Council Recommendation on the limitation of exposure of the general public to electromagnetic fields 0 Hz – 300 GHz ⁽⁶⁾,
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (A6-0089/2009),
- A. whereas electromagnetic fields (EMFs) exist in nature and have consequently always been present on earth; whereas, however, in recent decades, environmental exposure to man-made sources of EMFs has risen constantly, driven by demand for electricity, increasingly more specialised wireless technologies, and changes in the organisation of society; whereas the end effect is that every individual is now being exposed to a complex mixture of electric and magnetic fields of different frequencies, both at home and at work,

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 199, 30.7.1999, p. 59.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 159, 30.4.2004, p. 1.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 91, 7.4.1999, p. 10.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ L 374, 27.12.2006, p. 10.

⁽⁵⁾ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2008)0410.

⁽⁶⁾ OJ C 175, 21.6.1999, p. 129.

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- B. whereas wireless technology (mobile phones, Wi-Fi/WiMAX, Bluetooth, DECT landline telephones) emits EMFs that may have adverse effects on human health,
- C. whereas most European citizens, especially young people aged from 10 to 20, use a mobile phone, an object serving a practical purpose and as a fashion accessory, and whereas there are continuing uncertainties about the possible health risks, particularly to young people whose brains are still developing,
- D. whereas the dispute within the scientific community regarding the potential health risks arising from EMFs has intensified since 12 July 1999, when exposure limits for fields in the 0 Hz to 300 GHz range were laid down in Recommendation 1999/519/EC,
- E. whereas the fact that the scientific community has reached no definite conclusions has not prevented some national or regional governments, in China, Switzerland, and Russia, as well as in at least nine EU Member States, from setting what are termed 'preventive' exposure limits, that is to say, lower than those advocated by the Commission and its independent scientific committee, the Scientific Committee on Emerging and Newly Identified Health Risks ⁽¹⁾,
- F. whereas actions to limit the exposure of the general public to EMFs should be balanced against improvements to quality of life, in terms of safety and security, brought about by devices transmitting EMFs,
- G. whereas among the scientific projects arousing both interest and controversy is the Interphone epidemiological study, financed by an EU contribution of EUR 3 800 000, primarily under the Fifth RTD Framework Programme ⁽²⁾, the findings of which have been awaited since 2006,
- H. whereas, however, there are some points that appear to be the subject of general agreement, in particular the idea that reactions to microwave exposure vary from one person to another, the need, as a matter of priority, to conduct exposure tests under actual conditions in order to assess the non-thermal effects associated with radio-frequency (RF) fields, and the fact that children exposed to EMFs are especially vulnerable ⁽³⁾,
- I. whereas the EU has laid down exposure limits to protect workers from the effects of EMFs; whereas on the basis of the precautionary principle such measures should also be taken for the sections of population concerned, such as residents and consumers,
- J. whereas the Special Eurobarometer report on Electromagnetic Fields (No 272a of June 2007) indicates that the majority of citizens do not feel that the public authorities inform them adequately on measures to protect them from EMFs,
- K. whereas it is necessary to continue investigations into intermediate and very low frequencies so that conclusions can be drawn as to their effects on health,
- L. whereas the use of Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) must not be threatened by Directive 2004/40/EC as MRI technology is at the cutting edge of research, diagnosis and treatment of life-threatening diseases for patients in Europe,

⁽¹⁾ Opinion of 21 March 2007 adopted at the 16th plenary meeting of the Committee.

⁽²⁾ Quality of life programme, contract No QLK4-1999-01563.

⁽³⁾ March 2001 STOA study on 'The physiological and environmental effects of non-ionising EMR', PE297.574.

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M. whereas the MRI safety standard IEC/EN 60601-2-33 establishes limit values for EMFs which have been set so that any danger to patients and workers is excluded,

1. Urges the Commission to review the scientific basis and adequacy of the EMF limits as laid down in Recommendation 1999/519/EC and report to the Parliament; calls for the review to be undertaken by the Scientific Committee on Emerging and Newly Identified Health Risks;

2. Calls for particular consideration of biological effects when assessing the potential health impact of electromagnetic radiation, especially given that some studies have found the most harmful effects at lowest levels; calls for active research to address potential health problems by developing solutions that negate or reduce the pulsating and amplitude modulation of the frequencies used for transmission;

3. Maintains that as well as, or as an alternative to, amending European EMFs limits, the Commission, working in coordination with experts from Member States and the industries concerned (electricity companies, telephone operators and manufacturers of electrical appliances including mobile phones), should draw up a guide to available technology options serving to reduce exposure to EMFs;

4. Notes that industry stakeholders as well as relevant infrastructure managers and competent authorities can already influence certain factors, for example setting provisions with regards to the distance between a given site and the transmitters, the height of the site in relation to the height of the base station, or the direction of a transmitting antenna in relation to living environments, and, indeed, should obviously do so in order to reassure, and afford better protection to, the people living close to such facilities; calls for optimal placement of masts and transmitters and further calls for the sharing of masts and transmitters placed in this way by providers so as to limit the proliferation of poorly positioned masts and transmitters; calls on the Commission and Member States to draw up appropriate guidance;

5. Invites the Member States and local and regional authorities to create a one-stop shop for authorisation to install antennas and repeaters, and to include among their urban development plans a regional antenna plan;

6. Urges the authorities responsible for authorising the siting of mobile telephony antennas to reach agreement, jointly with the operators in that sector, on the sharing of infrastructure, in order to reduce the volume thereof and the exposure of the public to EMFs;

7. Acknowledges the efforts of mobile communications and other EMF-transmitting wireless technologies to avoid damaging the environment, and in particular to address climate change;

8. Considers that, given the increasing numbers of legal actions and measures by public authorities having the effect of a moratorium on the installation of new EMF-transmitting equipment, it is in the general interest to encourage solutions based on negotiations involving industry stakeholders, public authorities, military authorities and residents' associations to determine the criteria for setting up new GSM antennas or high-voltage power lines, and to ensure at least that schools, crèches, retirement homes, and health care institutions are kept clear, within a specific distance determined by scientific criteria, of facilities of this type;

9. Calls on the Member States to make available to the public, jointly with the operators in the sector, maps showing exposure to high-voltage power lines, radio frequencies and microwaves, and especially those generated by telecommunications masts, radio repeaters and telephone antennas. Calls for that information to be displayed on an internet page so that it can easily be consulted by the public, and for it to be disseminated in the media;

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10. Proposes that the Commission consider the possibility of using funding from the Trans-European Energy Networks to investigate the effects of EMFs at very low frequencies, and particularly in electrical power lines;
11. Calls on the Commission, during the 2009-2014 parliamentary term, to launch an ambitious programme to gauge the electromagnetic compatibility between waves created artificially and those emitted naturally by the human body with a view to determining whether microwaves might ultimately have undesirable consequences for human health;
12. Calls on the Commission to present a yearly report on the level of electromagnetic radiation in the EU, its sources, and actions taken in the EU to better protect human health and the environment;
13. Calls on the Commission to find a solution enabling Directive 2004/40/EC to be implemented more rapidly and thus ensure that workers are properly protected against EMFs, just as they are already protected under two other Community acts against noise ⁽¹⁾ and vibration ⁽²⁾ and to introduce a derogation for MRI under Article 1 of that Directive;
14. Deplores the fact that, as a result of repeated postponements since 2006, the findings of the Interphone study have yet to be published, the purpose of this international epidemiological study being to establish whether there is a link between use of mobile phones and certain types of cancer, including brain, auditory nerve, and parotid gland tumours;
15. Draws attention in this context to the appeal for caution from the coordinator of the Interphone study, Elisabeth Cardis, who, in the light of existing knowledge, recommends, as far as children are concerned, that mobile phones should not be used beyond reasonable limits and that landlines should be preferred;
16. Believes in any event that it is up to the Commission, which has an important contribution to the financing of this global study, to ask those in charge of the project why no definitive findings have been published and, should it receive an answer, to inform Parliament and the Member States without delay;
17. Also suggests to the Commission, to make for efficiency in policy and budget terms, that the Community funding earmarked for studies on EMFs be partly switched to finance a wide-ranging awareness campaign to familiarise young Europeans with good mobile phone techniques, such as the use of hands-free kits, keeping calls short, switching off phones when not in use (such as when in classes) and using phones in areas that have good reception;
18. Considers that such awareness-raising campaigns should also familiarise young Europeans with the health risks associated with household devices and the importance of switching off devices rather than leaving them on stand-by;
19. Calls on the Commission and Member States to increase research and development funding for the evaluation of potential long-term adverse effects of mobile telephony radio frequencies; calls also for an increase in public calls for proposals for investigation of the harmful effects of multiple exposure to different sources of EMFs, particularly where children are concerned;

⁽¹⁾ Directive 2003/10/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 6 February 2003 on the minimum health and safety requirements regarding the exposure of workers to the risks arising from physical agents (noise) (OJ L 42, 15.2.2003, p. 38).

⁽²⁾ Directive 2002/44/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 June 2002 on the minimum health and safety requirements regarding the exposure of workers to the risks arising from physical agents (vibration) (OJ L 177, 6.7.2002, p. 13).

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20. Proposes that the European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies be given the additional task of assessing scientific integrity in order to help the Commission forestall possible cases of risk, conflict of interests, or even fraud that might arise now that competition for researchers has become keener;
 21. Calls on the Commission, in recognition of the public concern in many Member States, to work with all relevant stakeholders, such as national experts, non-governmental organisations and industrial sectors, to improve the availability of, and access to, up-to-date information understandable to non-specialists on wireless technology and protection standards;
 22. Calls on the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection and the World Health Organisation (WHO) to be more transparent and open to dialogue with all stakeholders in standard setting;
 23. Condemns certain particularly aggressive marketing campaigns by telephone operators in the run-up to Christmas and other special occasions, including for example the sale of mobile phones designed solely for children or free call time packages aimed at teenagers;
 24. Proposes that the EU's indoor air quality policy should encompass the study of 'wireless' domestic appliances, which, like Wi-Fi for Internet access and digital enhanced cordless telecommunications (DECT) telephones, have been widely adopted in recent years in public places and in the home, with the result that citizens are being continuously exposed to microwave emissions;
 25. Calls, given its constant concern to improve consumer information, for the technical standards of the European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardisation to be amended with a view to imposing labelling requirements whereby the transmitting power would have to be specified and every wireless-operated device accompanied by an indication that it emitted microwaves;
 26. Calls on the Council and Commission, in coordination with the Member States and the Committee of the Regions, to encourage the introduction of a single standard designed to ensure that local residents are subjected to as low a degree of exposure as possible when high-voltage grids are extended;
 27. Is greatly concerned about the fact that insurance companies are tending to exclude coverage for the risks associated with EMFs from the scope of liability insurance policies, the implication clearly being that European insurers are already enforcing their version of the precautionary principle;
 28. Calls on Member States to follow the example of Sweden and to recognise persons that suffer from electrohypersensitivity as being disabled so as to grant them adequate protection as well as equal opportunities;
 29. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Committee of the Regions, and the WHO.
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