



Federal GAO Report Does Not Rule Out Cell Phone Dangers

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May 25, 2001 Washington, D. C. - The United States now has one hundred fifteen million cell phone subscribers. In only three more years, global use of cell phones is estimated to reach 2.1 billion . Yet, no one can guarantee their safety.

Cellular phones use microwaves to transmit conversations and those microwave frequencies are emitted by microwave antenna towers. Even if the phones operate in microwave frequencies that are lower than microwave ovens, cell users still report burning on ears, cheeks and hands. Many think that the increase in brain tumors in the past fifteen years is also linked to people cradling cell phones between their shoulder and ear. The strongest radiation is emitted near a cell phone's antenna.

Microwave News in New York reports that, "In the United States, attorneys in several states have filed lawsuits alleging that cellular phone companies have not taken adequate steps to protect people from possible radiation hazards."

Given the intense public concern and scientific confusion about the safety levels of radio and microwave frequency exposures, last year U. S. Senator Joe Lieberman of Connecticut and Representative Ed Markey of Massachusetts asked the Government Accounting Office to review cell phone health research and regulations. On May 22, the GAO released a report that said, "it will likely be many more years before a definitive conclusion can be reached on whether mobile phone emissions pose any risk to human health." The report also said that the Federal Communications Commission should standardize the testing process that determines whether cell phones comply with federal radiation limits. The GAO also advised that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) report to the public what is learned in current research funded by the Cellular Telecommunications and Internet Association.

Sen. Lieberman (D-Conn.) and Rep. Markey (D-Mass.) recommended that the FCC and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) set up a website and call center to make it easier for consumers to look up the radiation level of particular cell phone models. The lawmakers also suggested that people use headsets, keep the phones away from their bodies and make shorter calls to reduce microwave exposure.

Cell phone use by people driving cars has also been blamed for several fatal accidents the past year. This week also, Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-N.Y.), sponsored the first federal legislation that would require drivers to wear a handsfree earpiece or use a speaker phone.

Now California's Council on Wireless Technology Impacts (CWTI) is supporting the National Toxicology Program's efforts to have radio frequency radiation declared a toxin. Yesterday I talked with the Council's Executive Director about the GAO report and their human health concerns.

Earthfiles, news category.

Interview:

Libby Kelley, Executive Director, Council on Wireless Technology Impacts, Novato, California:

"We just learned that the National Toxicology Program which is at the National Institute of Environmental Health Services (NIEHS) is now undertaking some animal studies that have been required in order to complete the body of evidence needed for the National Toxicology Program to review radio frequency radiation as an environmental toxin. This is extremely important and NIEHS has just received \$10 million to go ahead and do this research. All these pieces have to come together.

But I believe the GAO is basically reporting the status quo. One concern I have is that when they reviewed the epidemiology studies that have been produced in the last several months out of Denmark and two of them in the Journal of the American Medical Association and the International Journal of Oncology, they seemed to emphasize the studies which many scientists believe are minimizing the cell phone user link to cancers by using study samples of groups of people who prior to 1986 were early adapters, but used cell phones only one to two hours a day or less. Not at all the type of use you see today. These people developed tumors, but there weren't that many of them and so the link is not very strong.

OF RESEARCHERS YOU HAVE TALKED TO, WHAT ARE THEIR GREATEST CONCERNS ABOUT THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC MOVE TO PUSH THE RESIDENTIAL PERSON AND THE BUSINESS TO WIRELESS MACHINES THAT ARE GOING TO FUNCTION WITH MICROWAVES?

That's a big question. I think on the international front, we are starting to see the industry blink. I was invited to speak at a Fortune 500 international conference for journalists on public health points of view about the technology. There is a conference being planned for the fall in the United Kingdom which basically will do the same thing: training the telecom corporations about how to deal with perception of risk and opposition by community members, recognizing now that there are many environmental concerns out there that they are going to have to overcome.

I think in 1994 when the GAO did their last report on cell phones and asked for more research, there were only about 16 million cell phone users then. They were using analog phones and not very often. Now here we are. It's 2001 with 110 million cell phone users and growing every day. Globally, we're going to be into 2.1 billion cell phone users by 2005. And yet, we still don't know whether there is a risk?! And we're still only working on anecdotal information about the affects on peoples' health?!

Well, that's why many schools and parents - especially parents - are involved at the school level to ward off siting of cellular antennas on school buildings and to keep wireless internet out of the classroom. They don't want their children to be a guinea pig.

COULD YOU ADDRESS THAT ISSUE IN LIGHT OF THIS CHERRY CREEK SCHOOL DISTRICT BATTLE WITH SPRINT IN ARAPAHOE COUNTY, COLORADO?

Yes, I've been involved in that. This is a fairly typical story of what parents need to go through in order to protect their children. Sprint came and signed a contract and the antennas went up during the summertime and the parents found out. It was up and was a done deal. And they started investigating. They got on the internet and started using the phone and e-mail like so many people do now to find out what they could find out that was credible. And what they learned is that the science is not certain., There is a high level of concern by independent parties and the industry's response is not very reassuring.

So, they started a large public relations campaign. They formed committees. They set up a website. They have recommended that people boycott Sprint. They sent letters to Sprint. They held public hearings and had press conferences. And they got the school to recognize that the school, at a minimum, had a huge public relations problem with dozens of parents threatening to remove their children from that school. So in the interest of keeping peace, the school has joined with the parents in requesting that Sprint now remove those antennas.

Sprint has come back a few days later and said, 'No.' They do not intend to remove the antennas. And I was speaking with one of the parents this morning and asked her how it was going. She told me that they are waiting for the 30 day notification period to be up and Sprint has advised them that if they remove those antennas, there will be a ripple affect elsewhere which is absolutely true. In fact, the ripple has come to them because this has been going on elsewhere in the country where cell phone carriers have been asked to remove antennas or cease construction and the schools are actively working with parents to protect children.

So, basically right now, they are in a waiting mode. The Cherry Creek parents and the school realize that Sprint may not remove those antennas and they will then be going into court.

And this is happening in England and in Australia and other parts of the world. There is an enormous undercurrent of communications where people are trying to help each other learn about and address this issue with a rapid deployment of wireless technologies coming straight at them where they live which is invading their privacy.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO LISTENERS WHO ARE CONCERNED ABOUT CELL TOWERS AND CELL PHONES IN THEIR AREA?

I would advise them to phone the EMR website and read the information on that site. The address is <http://www.emrnetwork.org>. That site has credible scientific information that was provided to the EMR network. And I am a founding director of the EMR network. We have sought to put together information that is credible, that can be justified and supported. And we are also working on federal public policy changes in the United States with the Vermont Congressional delegation. I think that people need to realize that they have to get into this and stay with it - not just their own tower, but learn all they can, educate others, evaluate their local wireless siting ordinance. If necessary, call for a moratorium to help their city leaders understand the health issues and not put them in a position where they are going to be sued but so that they can rewrite an ordinance just to be more protective just in case.

IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS OF ALL THE RESEARCH YOU TRY TO KEEP TRACK OF, WHAT DO YOU THINK PERSONALLY IS THE SINGLE MOST DRAMATIC CASE OF A HUMAN THAT IS SICK AND LINKS DIRECTLY TO USING A CELL PHONE OR BEING EXPOSED TO A NEARBY MICROWAVE TOWER?

One of the individuals I got to know as we made out film: *Public Exposure, DNA, Democracy and the Wireless Revolution* - which by the way, you can order through the EMR Network website. There is information on how to order that film from the Council On Wireless Technology Impacts. In the film, we interviewed a gentleman who worked for a start up mobile phone company who were developing a prototype of cell phone that had internet access capability. And it was pretty high powered. And this gentleman who lived in Southern California started experiencing some symptoms fairly early on. He was using this wireless device constantly. He was asked to use it as part of his job. Suddenly, he developed a tumor and it was a rapidly growing tumor. He was operated on 4 times and he is now recovering at home, seeking workman's compensation for his diagnosis.

WAS THE TUMOR EXACTLY WHERE THE CONTACT OF THE WIRELESS MACHINE WAS ON HIS BODY? WHERE WAS THE TUMOR?

The tumor was exactly where the antenna was and he held his cell phone by his head in precisely that manner. And this will be born out by the medical oncology tests which were done on his brain that shows the outline of the antenna. He talks about this in the film.

IT WAS A BRAIN TUMOR THEN?

It was a brain tumor, yes.

And it's hard to know where to go to be away from this infrastructure because it tends to be everywhere we are so we can all be artificially connected in this electronic world.

WHICH MAY BE DESTRUCTIVE IN THE LONG RUN?

That is what Dr. Robert Becker says. He believes that electromagnetic radiation poses a greater health risk than global warming."

More Information:

The Food and Drug Administration has budgeted \$10 million to try to scientifically prove if cell phones do, or do not, cause cancer in humans. The National Toxicology Program in North Carolina will expose rats to different doses of radiation, including levels emitted by cell phones. This study will be the most comprehensive animal toxicology ever performed on effects from cell phone microwave emissions and is expected to take five years to get reliable results.

Websites:

<http://www.emrnetwork.org/>

<http://www.franklaumen.de/>

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