



Comments on recent paper on base station exposure

A recent paper¹ by Austrian researchers has reported a study of subjective symptoms, sleep quality and cognitive performance of people living near to mobile phone base stations. The results were also presented to a 2002 workshop at Rhodes, Greece.

The paper concluded that “there was a significant relation of some symptoms to measured power density; this was highest for headaches” and that “[t]here was no significant effect on sleep quality”. The study also found that subjects displayed a small improvement in performance in one cognitive performance test.

The researchers recommended that, “[a]s a precautionary measure, siting of base stations should be such as to minimise exposure of neighbours”, despite noting that “exposure of the public in the vicinity of base stations is indeed low”.

In the same journal, a commentary on the paper² concluded that “the suspicion of a toxic effect is relatively low, and there may be disadvantages in over-precaution” and that “by distorting perceptions of risk, disproportionate precaution might paradoxically lead to illness that would not otherwise occur”.

Recent well-designed laboratory studies have not shown that electromagnetic fields from mobile phones would cause subjective symptoms or affect cognitive performance in human subjects.

The MMF notes the World Health Organization’s (WHO) position³ that there are no established health hazards from radiofrequency emissions from base stations and mobile phones below the level of international safety standards.

The commentary noted that an important limitation, “given the large number of health concerns examined in the study, is the possibility that some associations occurred by chance”. The commentary suggested that “[a]n alternative possibility is that illness occurs as a psychologically mediated response to a perceived hazardous exposure”.

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¹ Subjective symptoms, sleeping problems, and cognitive performance in subjects living near mobile phone base stations, Hutter *et al*, [Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 63\(5\):307-313](#).

² Commentary: Health risks from mobile phone base stations, Coggan, [Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 63\(5\):298-299](#).

³ Electromagnetic fields and public health: mobile telephones and their base stations, WHO Fact Sheet 193, see: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs193/en/>.