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4 June 2003

Our ref: TO1024923
Your ref: LR/005131/03

Dear Dr Lucas

Re: Council Recommendation (199/519/EC) of 12 July 1999 on the limitation of exposure of the general public to electromagnetic fields (0Hz to 300GHz)

I am responding to your letter of 4 March 2003 to Lord Rooker regarding the Council Recommendation. Your letter has been passed to me for reply as these are matters that are normally dealt with by the Department of Health. I must apologise for the long delay.

Your three bullet points are concerned with information, research and reporting back to the Commission. May I first refer you to the Commission document "Implementation report on the Council recommendation limiting the public exposure to electromagnetic fields (0Hz to 300GHz)" available on the Commission web site http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/ph_determinants/environment/EMF/emf_en.htm. Chapter 9 lists the Actions taken at Member State level and Para 9.15 contains the UK position compiled and drafted by the Commission from the reply to a questionnaire circulated in late 2001. This is essentially the report back to the Commission and encompasses the three aspects you have asked about.

I should perhaps say that although substantially correct, the way that some of the text has been worded could give a slightly misleading impression and furthermore a number of relevant developments have taken place in the past year. Perhaps I should briefly try to clarify the details. For example in the first paragraph of section a the 1974 HSE legislation was of course in place prior to the Council Recommendation. In the second paragraph, it is the interpretation of the limits in the Recommendation i.e. how the basic restriction relates to the external field that is being considered and this is necessarily part of a world-wide discussion. In the third paragraph the use of mobile phones in hospitals is restricted in areas where they might give rise to electromagnetic interference with electronic life support equipment. The word "forbidden" in this context should not imply a legal requirement.

Under section b, it could be misleading to suggest that the NRPB 1993 Guidelines do not address exposure levels from environmental exposure and indeed the next sentence states that these sources are well below those at which effects are known to occur. A definition of “electrosmog” later in the document (Chapter 12) would imply that the NRPB guidelines do in fact address the issue but I am not convinced that the term is always used in the same way. It is however correct that exposure additivity is taken into account in the UK by Health and Safety Regulations.

It may be helpful if I mention three developments that have taken place in the last year. Firstly the Mobile Telecommunications and Health Research Programme (MTHR) is now under way. Individual projects and a description of the programme as a whole and how it operates can be found on www.mthr.org.uk. Secondly, the NRPB web site (www.nrpb.org) has now been redesigned as a much more user-friendly site. It is more amenable to public access and is regarded as a key source of information to which we can refer enquiries from the concerned public. Thirdly, the NRPB is in the process of reviewing the scientific data for adverse health effects from EMFs and how this evidence leads to quantitative exposure restrictions. NRPB is proposing that the exposure guidelines of the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation be adopted in the UK. An aim of the Consultation Document is to receive comments on the issues related to EMF exposure restrictions and aspects of precaution.

I hope you find the above information helpful.

Yours sincerely



George Hooker
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