EMFs Under Suspicion in Australian Cancer Cluster

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The brain tumor cluster at Australia's RMIT University is Topic A for EMF watchers around the world. It all began on Thursday when Australian TV news reported that the university had launched an investigation into seven cases of brain tumors among staff members in a 17-storey building on its Melbourne campus. Five of those who developed tumors worked on the top floor of the building (two others were on the 11th and 14th floors), and six of the seven had been there for more than a decade, according to the *Australian*, a national newspaper. Five of the cases were uncovered in the last month, while two others were reported in 1999 and 2001, Melbourne's *The Age* reported.

Initially, most of the attention was focused on the mobile phone antennas on the roof of the high-rise. But others point to power-frequency and other types of EMFs as a possible cause. For instance, Don Maisch, a doctoral student at Wollongong University and an EMF activist based in Tasmania, wants to make sure the fields from electrical and electronic equipment housed on top of the building are properly measured. People working on the top floor "are very likely getting a good dose of ELF 'dirty electricity' with high voltage transients, harmonics, and RF all riding on the 50 Hz power supply" he wrote on his Blog. Others are not yet ready to discount the cell tower antennas. They challenge the idea that all the radiation is being beamed out towards the horizon; they point to possible sidelobes and reflections: "The floor below is definitely not a safe place!" commented Jean-Pierre Lentin, a French journalist and author of *Ces Ondes Qui Tuent, Ces Ondes Qui Soignent* (*Waves that Kill, Waves that Heal*).

The RMIT cluster is by no means the first brain tumor cluster that has been linked to EMFs, and most of the efforts to find theirs causes have been perfunctory at best. Take, for example, the cluster of 12 cancer cases, including five brain tumors, that was identified at a Congressional office building in Washington in the early 1990s. Even though the director of the Congressional Budget

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Office himself requested an investigation, the health hazard evaluation performed by NIOSH, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, was a sham. "No good came out of the report," said one of those who worked in the building at the time. (More details on this and other clusters are available in our M/A93 issue.)

Today, a number of experts quoted in the press are already saying that the causes of the brain tumors will probably not be identified. "To be quite frank, I think it's an unfortunate coincidence," Prof. Michael Abramson of Melbourne's Monash University told the *Australian*. Abramson is a director of the Australian Centre of RF Bioeffects Research). Mark Elwood, the head of the National Cancer Control Initiative made a similar argument to *The Age*. Elwood has been a consultant to both the electric utility and the telecom industries in the past.

Whether the promised investigation will uncover anything will depend on those who carry it out. (Interestingly, the head of RMIT's school of engineering, Professor Irena Cosic, is also a director of the Australian RF research center.) Will it be another whitewash or will the Australians rise to the occasion and do a careful and detailed investigation? We'll let you know.

Australia, cancer cluster, RMIT, Mark Elwood, Don Maisch, Wollongong University, Jean-Pierre Lentin, ACRBR,

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