It's Official: Mike Repacholi Is an Industry Consultant And He's Already in Hot Water

November 13, 2006

Just months after leaving his post as the head of the EMF project at the World Health Organization (WHO), Mike Repacholi is now in business as an industry consultant. The Connecticut Light and Power Co. (CL&P), a subsidiary of Northeast Utilities, and the United Illuminating Co. (UI) have hired Repacholi to help steer the Connecticut Siting Council away from a strict EMF exposure standard.

The siting council is in the process of revising the state's EMF policies. Last year, it hired its own consultant, Peter Valberg of the Gradient Corp., to review the current state of EMF health research. Valberg's report, submitted in January, proposes a "screening level" of 100 mG to protect against any adverse health effects "even in a hypothetically more sensitive sub-population" —that is, it would also protect young children. (What's a screening level? See below.)

The Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH), on the other hand, is backing a limit of 6-to-10 mG, based on epidemiological studies pointing to a childhood leukemia risk at magnetic field levels above 3-4 mG.

The DPH has been sharply critical of Valberg's report. In a May 31 submission to the siting council, the DPH advised that it provided "simplistic reviews of the science that lead to an ill-conceived mG target level." Valberg's proposed 100 mG level simply does not give "adequate protection" for children, according to the DPH. (The department filed additional comments on October 25. These latter comments, but not those filed on May 31, are available on the council's Web site.)

One Industry Consultant Supports Another

The two electric utilities commissioned Repacholi to prepare detailed comments to support Valberg and to rebut the DPH [note

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this is 4.1 MB file]. They were submitted to the siting board on October 26. And on the same day, CL&P and UI set up a conference call to give Repacholi an opportunity to convince DPH officials to follow the policies he had devised at the WHO EMF project —for instance, to stick to the ICNIRP guidelines, which would allow children to be exposed to up to 833 mG on a continuous basis.

Repacholi's filing has been criticized for citing, and at times misrepresenting, as-yet unreleased WHO reports for the benefit of his corporate clients. Some see this as a continuation of his activities at the WHO, where Repacholi was often accused of favoring the mobile phone and electric utility industries at the expense of public health.

Others see Repacholi's consulting work as the closing of a circle. Industry provided financial support for the EMF project (see below) and Repacholi is now using the materials he prepared at the WHO with industry money to support their policy positions.

Interpreting the Epidemiological Studies

The state DPH believes that the EMF risk of childhood leukemia is serious. The epidemiological studies "cannot be dismissed," the DPH told the siting council.

Valberg and Repacholi interpret the data very differently and both seek to downplay, if not dismiss, these studies. For instance, whenever Valberg referred to the epidemiological evidence in his report, he almost always called it "weak." He argued that magnetic fields "cannot be accepted as a causal factor."

Repacholi went even further, calling the epidemiological evidence "very weak." The "100 mG screening level is extremely cautious and highly protective for all the public, including children," he asserted.

While Valberg and Repacholi may appear to be on opposite sides in this siting council proceeding, they are currently collaborating on a different, equally controversial, EMF issue. They have recently completed a paper together with Emilie van Deventer, the new head of the EMF project, on the possible health effects of wireless radiation. (It will appear in a future issue of *Environmental Health Perspectives* and was posted on the journal's Web site on November 6.) Following the playbook of other industry consultants, they have been selective about which research results they presented. For example, in a review of the findings of the ongoing Interphone study on the possible cancer risks associated with the use of mobile phones, they fail to mention perhaps the most disquieting result to date: A statistically significant risk of acoustic neuroma among those who had used mobile phones for more than ten years. The open question of possible long-term risks is simply ignored.

An “Absurd” Misrepresentation

To strengthen his testimony on behalf of the two electric utilities, Repacholi cited the findings of an unfinished WHO report — Environmental Health Criteria (EHC)— on EMF risks. Twenty invited experts drafted this report at a meeting in Geneva last October. The final version was expected to be made public months ago but it's still being edited by the WHO staff.

Repacholi has misrepresented the group's conclusions, according to Chris Portier, who chaired the expert panel. "The paraphrasing sometimes has gone a bit far and may be misleading," Portier told *Microwave News.* Portier is the associate director for risk assessment at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS).

Portier cited a couple of examples. In a summary of the WHO report, Repacholi states that the EHC panel concluded that "The epidemiological evidence cannot be used as a basis for standards (exposure limits)."

"Such a statement is absurd," said Portier, "Since they obviously can be used."

Also according to Repacholi's report: "The task group recognized that the ICNIRP (1998) guidelines provide adequate protection for all established health effects." This an "overstatement," Portier said, "As I recall our recommendation it was that these guidelines were protective for acute effects; we said nothing about all effects in this recommendation."

The way the EHC review was written and edited is itself controversial. Repacholi invited eight observers to attend the meeting: All eight were all from the electric utility industry. Even before the meeting, Repacholi solicited the views of a number of industry representatives, including Exponent's Bill Bailey, another CL&P/UI consultant.

Repacholi is also being criticized for using another unfinished WHO report in his comments to the siting council. Carl Blackman, Martin Blank, David Carpenter, Olle Johansson and Cindy Sage are troubled by Repacholi's appending a copy of his *Framework for Guiding Public Health Policy Options in Areas of Scientific Uncertainty.* They have written to Portier asking that he use his "influence" to get Repacholi to temporarily withdraw his testimony to the siting council pending the completion of that report.

This *Framework* has a rich history. Repacholi developed it with Leeka Kheifets who used to be his assistant at the WHO. Kheifets formerly worked at EPRI, the research arm of the electric utility industry, in Palo Alto, CA, and she still receives research support from EPRI. (See, for instance, this recent paper.) They wrote the *Framework* after they flip-flopped over whether the WHO should invoke the precautionary principle to address EMF health risks (see *MWN,* M/J03 p.1). After announcing that precaution was called for at a meeting in Brussels in early 2003, Repacholi backed off. Instead, he and Kheifets set out to devise a way to address all types of health risks. Like the EHC document, the *Framework* was still unfinished when Repacholi left the WHO last summer.

Mitch Gross, a spokesman for CL&P declined to offer any comment on Repacholi's work for the electric utility. "I would not attempt to address it," he said.

There is no word on how much Repacholi is being paid for his work on behalf of the two electric utilities. Two years ago, at a Connecticut hearing on a contested power line, Philip Cole of the University of Alabama, Birmingham, yet another CL&P/UI consultant, testified that he was being paid $400/hour. And Stuart Aaronson of the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City, a fourth CL&P/UI expert witness, said that he too was being paid $400/hour.

Screening Level vs. Exposure Standard

The origin of the term "screening level," used by Valberg in his report, is obscure. "[It's] a bit confusing," NIEHS' Portier told us. "I have not encountered it in this context." Portier was formerly the associate director of the U.S. National Toxicology Program.

Valberg may well be using it as a way of not talking about an "exposure standard." As Repacholi stated in his report for CL&P and UI, "It is important that the screening level is not perceived as a population exposure limit" because, in part, it could "provoke unwarranted public alarm."

Regardless of what Valberg calls it, Repacholi said that a 100 mG limit is unnecessary. He argued that there are no health effects below 10,000 mG (10 G). The "overwhelming weight of scientific evidence suggests that [exposure limits below 10,000 mG will result in] no health benefit," Repacholi told the council on behalf of the two utilities.

Other CL&P/UI consultants also don't see the need for an exposure standard. Exponent's Bailey, one of CL&P/UI most-called-upon expert witnesses, told the council that "making a recommendation of a screening value of a 100 mG quantifies something that may not be at all necessary."

As for Valberg, he testified at a state hearing held on April 20 that, "I certainly feel that in [the] range of 6 to 100 [mG], that it is not necessary to pay attention to the magnetic fields" [p.71 of the hearing record].

Industry Support for WHO EMF Project

Imagine, a Belgian magazine, is reporting in its November/December issue that the WHO EMF project has been receiving even more industry money than has been previously disclosed. In a cover story, titled "Mobile Telephony: We're All Guinea Pigs!," David Leloup revealed that the GSM Association (GSMA) recently increased its annual payment to €150,000 ($165,000). Before 2005, the GSMA contributed €50,000 ($55,000) a year.

This is in addition to the $150,000 a year, the Mobile Manufacturers Forum (MMF) gives the EMF project each year. (MMF's Mike

Milligan confirmed this to *Microwave News* in 2003.) Previously, Motorola gave Repacholi $50,000 a year; but the company now funnels its payments through the MMF.

Leloup estimates that these two mobile phone trade associations made up more than 40% of the EMF project's 2005-2006 budget.

The total contribution from the wireless industry is no doubt higher, however. Other groups have also been sending money to Repacholi. For instance, the FGF, the German wireless industry group, has been giving the project about €15,000 ($16,500) a year, according to Gerd Friedrich, the director of the FGF.

This does not include any possible support from the electric utlity industry.

Depleted Uranium Cover-Up?

In the first week of November, Repacholi was also in the news with respect to his work on ionizing radiation. Keith Baverstock. one of his former coworkers at the WHO charged that Repacholi had suppressed reports indicating that depleted uranium poses a cancer risk. In a radio interview, Repacholi called the eight peer-reviewed papers pointing to a genotoxic effect of depleted uranium that were assembled by Baverstock, "fairytale stuff."

Michael Repacholi, WHO, EMF Project, NIEHS, Michael Milligan, MMF, GSMA, Peter Valberg, Keith Baverstock, Christopher Portier, William Bailey, depleted uranium,

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