"It Could Be Having a Devastating Effect on Fertility"

October 26, 2006

The last time we checked earlier today, there were 124 different articles listed on Google News pegged to a report that cell phones can damage sperm quality. The more hours a day men spent on their phones, the greater the harm to the count, motility, viability and morphology of their sperm, according to a paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine, being held this week in New Orleans. Every major paper in England ran a detailed story, as did news media in Australia, India and New Zealand. (We didn't check foreign language outlets, though we did see links to some in China and Turkey.)

The favorite sound bite was from Ashok Agarwal, the lead author who is at the Cleveland Clinic. "It's just like using a toothbrush, but it could be having a devastating effect on fertility," he said, according to the BBC and many other sources.

The research was carried out by a team from one of America's top hospitals and was presented in a major American city and was about a device that is now used by more than 225 million Americans. Yet, other than a couple wire services (the AP not among them) and a few local radio and TV stations, this story was a non-event. None of the major U.S. dailies bothered to carry even a blurb about it.

"What's going on?" we asked a colleague. "Cell phone health risks are seen as an urban legend," he replied.

Maybe so, but it's worth noting that this is not the first time that a link between cell phone radiation and fertility problems has been alleged. Last year, a noted Australian researcher, John Aitken, reported that RF radiation (900 MHz) could have a significant genotoxic effect on the DNA of the sperm of mice. Also last year, a Hungarian team from the University of Szeged, based on a survey of 371 men, found that cell phones had a negative impact on sperm motility. And previously, a research group at Turkey's Dicle

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2025 Articles
2024 Articles
2023 Articles
2022 Articles
2021 Articles
2020 Articles
2019 Articles
2018 Articles
2017 Articles
2016 Articles
2015 Articles
2014 Articles
2013 Articles
2012 Articles
2011 Articles
2010 Articles
2009 Articles
2008 Articles
2007 Articles
2006 Articles
2005 Articles
2004 Articles

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University showed that microwaves can have a serious deleterious effect on sperm.

Editors and reporters in the U.S. have more important cell phone stories to write about. The front page of the business section of this morning's *New York Times* featured an item on a cell phone that costs $1,275. Now, that's news.

fertility, Ashok Agarwal, Cleveland Clinic, John Aitken, Turkey, Hungary, New York Times,

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