MICRO WAVE NEWS

A Report on Non-Ionizing Radiation

RMIT Cancer Cluster Survey: "No Anomalies"

May 25, 2006

RMIT University has announced that environmental surveys have identified "no anomalies" on the top two floors of the Melbourne building where a cluster of brain tumor cases had been identified (see our May 13 and May 19 posts).

The university obviously wants to allay staff and student health concerns, but the interim report on electromagnetic measurements will fall far short of accomplishing this. (We leave it to others to take a close look at the air and water quality tests, as well as the ionizing radiation survey.) The problem lies less with the measurements made by EMC Technologies, than with the context in which they are placed.

All the measured levels are compared to current Australian exposure limits, which like most other national standards, are not designed to protect against cancer risks, but rather shocks and burns. The measured levels are a tiny fraction of those that would present acute health risks, but such comparisons tell us nothing about the likelihood of possible chronic (e.g. cancer) hazards.

For instance, the maximum measured power-frequency (50 Hz) magnetic field was 14.4 mG on the top floor of the university building. EMC Technologies notes that this is only 1.4% of the limit for the general population, which is 1,000 mG. Put that way, it sounds like there's nothing to worry about —until one realizes that the EMF-childhood leukemia risk is believed to come into play at about 3-4 mG. In that context, the 14.4 mG is 350-480% above the cancer threshold. Had the report noted this, we doubt that the news media would have gone with a headline like "RMIT Tumour Tests Show Nothing Unusual," as did *The Age* earlier today.

We hasten to add that there is no confirmed link between adult brain tumors and EMF exposures, but the eight-year, US$7 million California EMF Program concluded that EMFs are a likely cause of brain cancer.

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A cancer risk at RF frequencies is more uncertain, but the same logic applies. If there is such a risk, it too would likely occur at much lower levels than that for RF burns. Here again, the exposure standards seek only to protect against such acute hazards. Converting the measured RF level into a percentage of the current exposure standard is misleading.

In our view, the EMF/EMR survey report settles nothing. It may be unfair to ask RMIT University to resolve an international controversy that has been raging for decades, but it has been thrust into it by this brain tumor cluster. And it is after all part of the Australian Centre for Radiofrequency Bioeffects Research.

An interesting coincidence: At practically the same moment that RMIT issued its survey results, the WHO EMF Project released a new fact sheet on "Base Stations and Wireless Technologies." It too presents the RF levels from mobile phone towers as a percentage of a standard that protect only against acute hazards. No one should be surprised. The WHO has consistently rejected the possibility of an EMF or RF cancer risk.

RMIT, Australia, EMC Technologies, WHO, EMF Project,

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