

Ofcom's growing health challenge

Michael Bevington, chair of trustees of the charity Electrosensitivity UK, reviews Ofcom's choice of short-term heating limits for radio frequency radiation (RFR).

Ofcom faces a growing challenge, on an unlikely topic - health.

1. As the UK government's regulator for mobile phones and all wireless devices, Ofcom is responsible for issuing the safety levels of RFR to ensure the nation's health. Yet Ofcom admits it has no health expertise.
2. To solve this problem, Ofcom handed over its responsibility to Public Health England (PHE), to be replaced by the National Institute for Health Protection (NIHP). Yet PHE also lacks health expertise on the actual established effects of RFR because its employees have been contractually required to deny all the health effects of RFR below thermal levels. Further, since the abolition in 2017 of its AGNIR committee set up in 1990 as a 'front' to deny RFR harm, PHE lacks expertise to review the science.
3. To solve this problem, PHE handed over its responsibility to a private German-based group called ICNIRP (International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection). However, ICNIRP still follows the arbitrary hypothesis proposed by Schwan in 1953, that the only adverse effect of RFR is short-term heating. This rules out long-term effects like cancer and infertility which, according to most involved scientists, are established results of cumulative exposure.

Schwan's heating hypothesis was known to be invalid in 1953, since during the 1930s non-thermal effects were established as primary, with thermal effects secondary. The USSR therefore imposed prototype non-thermal limits in 1935. However, the US government liked Schwan's hypothesis, with its unscientific but slack safety margins and thus reduced costs. They imposed it on regulators in 1957, despite objections to its arbitrary and unscientific basis. Further, in 1959 the World Health Organization (WHO) also accepted legal subservience to the radiation industry. In fact, ICNIRP was set up in 1992 by the wireless radiation industry as a 'front' to protect itself. Because the WHO adopted ICNIRP's radiation limits as its own, and ICNIRP has always included employees of PHE among its members, this small pro-industry clique - all holding Schwan's 1953 thermal theory - ensured that UK governments kept to its heating-only hypothesis.

So, how far is Ofcom complicit, as in its statement of October 2020, in harming the population by adopting ICNIRP's unscientific guidelines on RFR? Ofcom could, instead, have adopted international non-thermal and cumulative guidelines which would protect people. Ofcom cannot blame the government for choosing to adopt PHE's unscientific advice, since Ofcom is itself part of the government system, just as PHE was also part of the government through the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC). The government, which oversees PHE/NIHP, DHSC and Ofcom and appoints their leaders, cannot evade responsibility by claiming that it is taking advice from itself.

This raises three practical issues which Ofcom still refuses to face, despite most of the responses to its 2020 consultation referencing the established science on RFR adverse non-thermal health effects.

- Firstly, because Ofcom decided to follow PHE/ICNIRP/WHO's unscientific denial of the established health effects of RFR, it is unable to address cumulative effects of RFR.

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Ofcom/PHE's limit of six or 30 minutes does not cover the life-time exposures which UK children now face with Wifi at home and school, in addition to their often constant use of mobiles, iPads and fitbits, while possibly living near smart meters and phone masts. At the US Court of Appeal's hearing on January 25 2021, against the Federal Communications Commission (FCC)'s failure to follow the science in this area, the judges 'hammered' the FCC, according to reports. They asked why the FCC limited itself to only short-term thermal effects and not established cumulative effects. Ofcom/PHE has made the same mistake.

- Secondly, for similar reasons, Ofcom is unable to address the needs of the estimated 800,000 people in the UK who are severely affected by RFR at Ofcom's very high levels. Yet Ofcom is supposed to serve the whole population and not just part. This was also noted in the US Court of Appeal - why the FCC, which, like Ofcom, has no health expertise, did not concern itself with the devastating results of its decisions on the lives of those people severely affected by RFR. Ofcom, like a Californian Appeal Court on February 18 2021, should accept the disability of a person harmed by Wifi.
- Thirdly, there seems to be no effective means by which Ofcom engages with UK stakeholders whose lives are being ruined by Ofcom's unscientific viewpoint. Ofcom's ACOD does not seem to stand up for people disabled by EMFs. Over 80 people, who were harmed by the failures of PHE/ICNIRP/WHO/Ofcom, complained through their MPs to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) in 2014. However, in 2020 the PHSO's final decision was that PHE could give whatever advice it wished, including denying or ignoring established science. These are the very people for whom Ofcom should be concerned, but Ofcom/PHE seem to have abandoned them and denied their rights to a full life. Instead, it is left to volunteer groups, like the charity Electrosensitivity UK, to try to help the people whose lives have been ruined by Ofcom's mistaken decision.

The US judges asked why the FCC, like Ofcom, followed the thermal-only hypothesis and did not accept cumulative effects. In response, the FCC's lawyer contradicted 90 years of established scientific evidence. She simply declared that RFR, classified by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) as a 2B carcinogen because of its non-thermal effects, has no non-thermal effects! The FCC and Ofcom appear to be trying to deny the science, just like ignorant opposition to Galileo. Presumably Ofcom also ignores the overwhelming majority of the European Parliament in 2008 voting that ICNIRP Guidelines are obsolete. Presumably Ofcom also ignores the insurance industry's refusal to underwrite RFR, except as high risk like asbestos.

The UK's long-term health should be Ofcom's first goal, especially for our children growing up amid a much greater mass of RFR electrosmog than previous generations. We and our children deserve a much more scientific approach to RFR health dangers than reliance on Schwan's invalidated theory from 1953.

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March 2 2021