



By email

Our ref: 15/12/lh/488

16 January 2015

Dear

Re: Electromagnetic radiation

Thank you for your email of 15 December 2014 in which you asked about the health impact of electromagnetic radiation. Your questions have been considered under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act and the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR); however, the questions you have asked are not valid questions under either the FOI or EIR legislation because they do not ask for information we hold. However, in accordance with Section 16 of the FOI Act and Section 9 of the EIR - *duty to provide advice and assistance* the following information has been provided to address your questions.

You asked:

1. What legal responsibilities does PHE have for looking after public health?

Public Health England (PHE) was established in April 2013 and was set up to protect and improve the nation's health and wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities. PHE is an Executive Agency of the Department of Health. The Framework Agreement between the Department of Health and Public Health England (PHE) sets out PHE's overarching governance arrangements and can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england/about/our-governance>. Annex B to the Framework Document sets out the statutory functions that the Secretary of State for Health has instructed PHE to carry out on his behalf.

2. Does PHE acknowledge that electromagnetic radiation is a major contributor to serious health effects?

PHE's position on the health effects of electromagnetic fields (EMF) is set out in advice published most recently in the 2012 report from the independent Advisory Group on Non-ionising Radiation (AGNIR) and its response to it, which can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/radiofrequency-electromagnetic-fields-health-effects>.

3. Why is the UK's safety limit to exposure to electromagnetic radiation the highest in the world?

Alongside other European Union Member States, the United Kingdom supports European Council Recommendation 1999/519/EC on limiting exposure to EMFs. This Recommendation incorporates the 1998 guidelines from the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP), as advised by PHE. ICNIRP restated the radiofrequency (RF) parts of these guidelines in 2009 on the basis of its own comprehensive review of the scientific evidence published at that time. ICNIRP concluded that the scientific literature published since the 1998 guidelines had provided no evidence of any adverse health effects below the basic restrictions and did not necessitate an immediate revision of its guidance on limiting exposure to RF fields. The 2009 ICNIRP review and statement on exposure guidelines can be found at the following link, as can the rationale for 6 minutes averaging time: <http://www.icnirp.org/PubEMF.htm>.

The World Health Organization (WHO) states that the main conclusion from its own reviews is that EMF exposures below the limits recommended in the ICNIRP international guidelines do not appear to have any known consequence on health. WHO is presently preparing an Environmental Health Criteria (EHC) monograph covering the evidence in relation to radiofrequency exposures and health. This follows earlier EHCs published in 2006 on static fields and in 2007 on low frequency fields. Information from WHO about EMF exposure guidelines can be found at: <http://www.who.int/peh-emf/standards/en/>.

The 2012 AGNIR report, mentioned in response to question two above, considered whether there was evidence for health effects occurring in relation to exposures below the ICNIRP levels. The overall conclusion was that, although a substantial amount of research has been conducted in this area, there is no convincing evidence that radio wave exposures below guideline levels cause health effects in either adults or children.

If you have any queries regarding the information that has been supplied to you, please contact us at the address above or by emailing foi@phe.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely

Freedom of Information Officer