The ELF EMF Disconnect

Schüz Defends ICNIRP's 1,000 mG Limit

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It's the murky disconnect that undermines public confidence in EMF exposure standards: While epidemiological studies point to an increased risk of childhood leukemia at exposures as low as 3-4 mG, the ICNIRP exposure standard is over 200 times higher. That is, ICNIRP sees nothing wrong with exposing kids to 999 mG, 24/7. One reason this disparity is baffling is that Anders Ahlbom of Sweden's Karolinska Institute is both the chair of ICNIRP's committee on epidemiology and the person whose work —more than anyone else's other than Nancy Wertheimer's— has established the plausibility of the 3-4 mG threshold. The IEEE standard is even more out of sync: At over 9,000 mG: it's more than nine times higher than the ICNIRP limit.

Joachim Schüz, a prolific epidemiologist at the Danish Cancer Society in Copenhagen, and an up-and-coming member of the EMF establishment, offered a justification for the 1,000 mG limit at an ICNIRP workshop held in March 2006 in Berlin. The childhood leukemia-EMF association "is neither supported by experimental evidence nor by a plausible [mechanism]... It cannot be ruled out with reasonable confidence that the observed association is entirely due to chance, bias, and confounding." Schüz calls for "a careful evaluation of a possible benefit" before adopting precautionary measures, and favors "proper risk communication" over "[precipitous] actions to calm emotions." Schüz's views are in line with those of Paolo Vecchia and Mike Repacholi, the current and a former chair, respectively, of ICNIRP.

Are precautionary policies for power-frequency EMFs called for? Repacholi thought so a few years back before he flip-flopped (see *MWN,* M/J03, p.1). (Some say he reversed himself under pressure from the electric utility industry.) Should others follow the lead of Italy and Switzerland, which have recognized and accepted the epidemiological findings and adopted tougher limits? Are Repacholi, Schüz and Vecchia's current views sustainable? All these questions will no doubt be raised at a workshop being

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organized by the WHO EMF Project. *Developing and Implementing Protective Measures for ELF EMF* will be held in Geneva, June 20-21.

Schüz's paper and the 18 others presented at ICNIRP's 2006 *International Workshop on EMF Dosimetry and Biophysical Aspects Relevant to Setting Exposure Guidelines* appear in the June issue of *Health Physics*.

ICNIRP, Anders Ahlbom, Joachim Schüz, WHO, EMF Project, Danish Cancer Society, Paolo Vecchia, Michael Repacholi,

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