EPRI To Sponsor NIEHS Booklet on EMFs

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In an unprecedented move, the Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI), the research arm of the utility industry, will sponsor a public information booklet on EMFs for a unit of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) is working out an arrangement whereby EPRI would pay for the writing and printing of a new edition of the NIEHS booklet, *EMFs: Questions & Answers*.

"This would be absolutely hands off," Christine Flowers, the director of communications at NIEHS in Research Triangle Park, NC, told *Microwave News*. "They cannot influence the document."

News of the deal landed with a thud. "This is an outrageous proposal that should not be allowed to happen," said David Carpenter the director for the Institute for Health and the Environment at the State University of New York in Albany. "The public health issues are too serious to allow them to be perverted by EPRI and the industry. NIEHS has no business taking funds from a group with such a clear conflict of interest." Carpenter led the New York Power Line Project in the 1980s.

"It does sounds strange," said Michael Gallo of the Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences Institute in Piscataway, NJ, who has had a long association with NIEHS. "If totally funded by EPRI, it would then raise the question of objectivity," he added.

Another observer commented that this would be like having Exxon pay for an EPA pamphlet on global warming. No one interviewed, including those at NIEHS, could offer an example of an industry group paying for a government public health document in which it has a direct stake.

"You need a sharp line between government and industry," commented Seth Shulman, the author of *Undermining Science:*

Suppression and Distortion in the Bush Administration. "This makes me very uncomfortable, it seems highly inappropriate."

Merrill Goozner, the director of the Integrity in Science project at the Center for Science in the Public Interest in Washington, offered a similar view: "This is a new one on me and it sounds a little dangerous."

Chris Portier, the associate director of NIEHS, is brokering the deal between the institute and EPRI. "If they are truly going to do this with no strings attached, it would be remiss of me not to accept it," he said in an interview. Portier explained that EPRI would contribute to the NIEHS' "Gift Fund" and then "we could spend it any way we want." He estimated that the job would cost $100,00-$130,000 for 30,000 copies and take 12 to 15 months to complete. "We will not do it in-house, a contractor would do it," Portier said.

In a flyer that seeks contributions from member electric utilities, EPRI explains the need for a new Q&A booklet, which was last revised in 2002:

> "It is critically important that the public relies on EMF health-related information that is timely and relevant. Since 2002, the research conducted on EMF health effects… has expanded… An update to the 2002 edition of the report will ensure that the public has access to the best information when deliberating over new transmission line projects."

EPRI is asking participating utilities to contribute $30,000 apiece.

One of the ironies of this project is that, in recent years, EPRI has taken a stand against public information, denying the public access to its research findings. Reports that EPRI used to make available to the press and interested parties are now kept under wraps. The only way to obtain an EPRI report today is to buy it at a cost of $5,000 or more. Rob Kavet, the director of EPRI's EMF program, and his predecessor, Leeka Kheifets, have made it difficult to get even the most basic information about EPRI's activities. Kavet routinely declines to respond to e-mails for clarification on EMF issues, as does the EPRI office of media relations. Since returning from serving as Mike Repacholi's assistant at the WHO EMF project in Geneva, Kheifets has gone back to work as an EPRI consultant.

The first edition of the Q&A booklet was released in 1995 and revised in 2002. NIEHS' Mary Wolfe, who coordinated the last revision, will also work on the new round, Portier said.

EPRI, NIEHS, Michael Gallo, David Carpenter, Christopher Portier, Mary Wolfe, Robert Kavet, Leeka Kheifets,

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