NAS RF Report: More Research Needed, But No Priorities Offered

Committee Told Not To Include Them

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The NAS-NRC report, released today (see our January 15 post), presents a laundry list of research needs to better understand the possible health effects of RF radiation. What's missing is any sense of priorities. The NAS-NRC committee that prepared the report fails to indicate whether characterizing a child's exposure from a cell phone is more important than doing an epidemiological study of children who use them; or whether mechanistic studies are more important than laboratory toxicology experiments.

"We were told not to put priorities on the research needs," Frank Barnes, the chair of the NAS-NRC panel, told *Microwave News* in a telephone interview from his office at the University of Colorado in Boulder. "They were quite strict about this." When asked who "they" were, Barnes replied that he is not sure whether the order came from the NAS-NRC or from the FDA, which requested the report. "It does not make much sense to me," Barnes said, "I would have defined our mission differently."

Another notable omission is a discussion of the results from the Interphone project. Barnes explained that this was because the final Interphone paper is not yet available. But that's only part of the story. The report does comment on an Interphone methodological analysis —suggesting that selection bias would lead to underestimating the tumor risks— yet it does not acknowledge that published papers from a number of the participating countries, either alone or in a group, have found that long-term users of cell phones have higher rates of two types of tumors (acoustic neuromas and brain tumors). The Israeli study pointing to an increased risk of a third type of tumor, of the parotid gland, among heavy cell phone users came too late (December 6) to be included, according to Barnes.

The report does allow that, "The pending results of the Interphone study... are likely to have a major influence on the direction and

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scope of future research concerning the use of cellular phones and cancer." But why did the NAS-NRC panel not address the disquieting findings published to date? They too would have prompted an imperative to do more research, especially if the panel had noted that the Interphone results are largely consistent with the Swedish studies of Lennart Hardell and Kjell Hansson Mild.

Most close observers now believe that the epidemiological data show that a health risk from mobile phones can no longer be dismissed. (That's what a senior and well-connected member of the bioelectromagnetic community told us recently.) No one involved with this new report, not the committee, not the NAS-NRC, not the FDA and certainly not the cell phone industry, which paid for it, had any interest in fostering a sense of urgency to step up the pace of health studies. This is especially true in the U.S., where RF research is moribund.

The NAS-NRC committee may not have wanted to highlight the epi findings but it was not reticent about dismissing the controversial and, for many still unresolved, field of RF genotoxicity. The panel favored Vijayalaxmi's and Joe Roti Roti's view that RF radiation cannot cause DNA breaks, and thereby rejected the work of Henry Lai, among they wrote.

Other studies pointing to effects on DNA —such as those from Austria and China— are not cited. The only panel member with direct experience with the RF–DNA work is France's Bernard Veyret, who has openly feuded with the Austrian group, led by Hugo Rüdiger at the University of Vienna. Score one for Veyret.

Lai, Roti Roti and Vijayalaxmi each gave a talk at a workshop hosted by the NAS-NRC panel last August (see our August 10, 2007 post). Barnes told us that the report was "mostly" based on what was presented at the August workshop. Who at the NAS-NRC selected the workshop speakers is not known. Barnes could not shed any light on this but said that, "We tried to have as much diversity of opinion as we could."

Nor is it clear who picked the reviewers of the committee's report. What does come across is that the NAS-NRC was unmoved by those who urged it to limit industry influence. At the time the committee's membership was made public, some asked that Leeka Kheifets, a long-time associate of EPRI, the research arm of the electric utility industry, be removed from the panel. The NAS-NRC not only rejected this appeal but later sought advice from another EPRI staffer, Gabor Mezei. The other surprising choice for a reviewer is Teri Vierima of Resources Strategies Inc., a consulting firm that lists EPRI and a host of wireless companies as clients.

Rick Jostes, the NAS-NRC study director, no doubt played a key role in selecting both the workshop speakers and reviewers of the panel's report. Jostes, widely viewed as a skeptic of low-level RF biological effects, retired on December 31.

National Academy of Sciences, Frank Barnes, Leeka Kheifets, EPRI, Resource Strategies,

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