MICRO WAVE NEWS

A Report on Non-Ionizing Radiation

Making It Up As He Goes Along

Paolo Boffetta, Italian Epidemiologist, Distorts Power Line Health Risks

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Facts don't seem to mean much anymore. We live in a "post-truth" time. So much so that post-truth was recently named the international word of the year. As 2017 opened for business, a stark example of the new reality came to our attention courtesy of Paolo Boffetta, an Italian epidemiologist now at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City.

In an interview with Fox News, Boffetta said that the link between power lines and childhood leukemia had been debunked. In response to a question as to whether it was safe for a pregnant woman to live next to a "huge power line," Boffetta advised that there was no reason for concern.

According to Boffetta, the 1979 classic study by Nancy Wertheimer and Ed Leeper pointing to higher rates of leukemia among children living near high-current power lines had been contradicted by "newer and better" studies, carried out with improved methodology. Boffetta sent a clear message that "very high exposures" to power line EMFs are safe for pregnant women and children.

Boffetta has lost his truth compass.

The peer-reviewed literature offers ample evidence that the Wertheimer-Leeper study has been confirmed repeatedly and stands unchallenged —except by a few industry diehards. When an IARC expert panel unanimously designated power line fields as a possible human carcinogen in 2001, the decision was based on that body of work. "The epidemiological data are there and it is hard to dismiss them," one member of the panel told us at the time.

We asked Boffetta to tell us which studies had disproved the Wertheimer-Leeper association. He did not answer. We also asked what were the very high exposures he was referring to since Wertheimer and Leeper had implicated exposure levels that were

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thousands of times lower than most exposure limits. Here too, Boffetta did not respond.

At the time of the IARC assessment, EMFs were seen as a possible rather than a probable or known cancer agent because of two missing links —the lack of supporting animal studies and a biophysical mechanism to explain how magnetic fields can lead to cancer. Last year, an Italian group at the Ramazzini Institute in Bologna filled in one of the blanks. Morando Soffritti and coworkers published the largest EMF–animal study ever done showing a clear indication of cancer promotion. The Italian toxicology community is a tight-knit group. It is inconceivable that Boffetta is unaware of the Ramazzini findings.

“What Boffetta is saying is wrong,” David Carpenter, the director of the Institute for Health and the Environment in Albany, NY, told us. “This guy simply doesn’t know what he is talking about.” In the 1980’s, Carpenter ran the New York Power Line Project, which funded the first replication of the Wertheimer-Leeper study.

Boffetta, Asbestos and Mount Sinai

Boffetta has long been one of industry’s go-to scientists. His work on behalf of corporate clients has been well-documented —none more so than his attempt to play down the risks of asbestos. In December 2013, *Le Monde,* the leading French daily, described his efforts under the headline: “Epidemiologie: Des Liaisons Dangereuses” [dangerous links]. The article detailed Boffetta’s association with the International Prevention Research Institute, a consulting firm with close ties to industry, as well as his testimony as an expert witness for a company accused of negligence after workers died from mesothelioma following asbestos exposure.

The fact that Boffetta defended —with what some have called spurious evidence— companies whose workers were poisoned by asbestos and the fact that he now holds a senior position in cancer prevention at Mount Sinai School of Medicine is heavy with irony. It was at Mount Sinai beginning in the 1960’s that Irving Selikoff documented the lethal hazards of asbestos. His work gained international recognition. Today Sinai’s Centers for Occupational Health are named in his honor.

Philip Landrigan took over from Selikoff as the director of Mount Sinai’s Division of Environmental and Occupational Health in 1985. In an e-mail exchange, we asked Landrigan whether he agreed with what Boffetta, his Mount Sinai colleague, was saying about EMF health risks. “No,” he replied. Landrigan is now the Dean for Global Health at Sinai.

“The Devil’s Advocate”

Boffetta’s ties are not limited to the asbestos industry. In 2014, Riccardo Staglianó, a reporter at *La Repubblica,* a major Italian newspaper, published a profile of Boffetta. He pointed to a list of what he called “convergences” between Boffetta’s scientific conclusions and the interests of his corporate sponsors.

Boffetta seemed keen, according to Staglianó, to play down the health risks of myriad toxic agents including dioxin, beryllium, acrylamide, diesel exhaust, and heavy metals, in addition to asbestos. The article was titled, “Lo Scienziato che perdona il diesel e la diossina” [The scientist who forgives diesel and dioxin]. Staglianó is the author of a book on cell phone health risks, published in 2012.

Kathleen Ruff, a Canadian human rights activist and asbestos campaigner, has closely tracked Boffetta's work on asbestos.[1] In an interview with an epidemiology newsletter three years ago, this is how she portrayed Boffetta:

> “Paolo Boffetta is another example of a prestigious scientist who betrays science, by choosing to set up a lucrative consulting company and hire himself out to toxic industries, publishing findings that distort the scientific evidence and deny harm caused by the industries’ products.”

In that 2014 article, Staglianó’s editors at *La Repubblica* described Boffetta as “The Devil’s Advocate.”

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1. See Ruff’s review of Boffetta’s asbestos activities.

Related story:
No Cancer Risk from Power Lines, Says the *New York Times*

Paolo Boffetta, power lines, ELF EMFs, childhood leukemia, Fox News, Ramazzini Institute, David Carpenter, Irving Selikoff, Philip Landrigan, Nancy Wertheimer, Ed Leeper, Riccardo Staglianó, Kathleen Ruff, asbestos,

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