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

Big Score for Industry Scientists

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Still worried about power lines and cancer? That's so retro, says the *New York Times*. You're just stuck in the 1980's.

This is what the "newspaper of record" wants you to know about the risk of childhood leukemia from power lines: A "fairly broad consensus among researchers holds that no significant threat to public health has materialized."

The full message is told in a new 7+ minute video, produced by the *Times'* RetroReport, which boasts a staff of 13 journalists and 10 contributors, led by Kyra Darnton. The video even credits a fact checker. What's missing is the common sense to do some digging when reporting on a controversial issue.

If Darnton's crew had done its homework, they would have realized that their view is based on two industry-friendly researchers, David Savitz and John Moulder. Savitz, now VP for research at Brown University, has come a long way since he first reported that power lines are linked to childhood leukemia back in 1986. Power line EMFs have been very, very good for Savitz's career. He parlayed that study into a multimillion contract from the electric power industry to study cancer risks among electric utility workers. He found a link to brain tumors. A couple of years later, he paid the industry back by renouncing his own work and that of many others. Now he's done it again with his original power line study in the new *Times* video.

As for Moulder, everybody in the EMF community knows that he has pocketed bundles of money testifying for companies denying that power lines or cell phones present any risk. We long ago detailed Moulder's work for industry.

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Those who make the effort to read the scientific literature can see that a number of different groups have pooled the results of the many epidemiological studies on EMFs and childhood cancer and each has reaffirmed the link —as both Savitz and Moulder are well aware. (Here are details on the two best known meta-analyses.) The pooled analyses prompted the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) to classify power line EMFs as a possible human carcinogen back in 2001. The advice still stands. Indeed, the evidence is stronger today than it was back then.

The video also cites a National Academy of Sciences report: This too was mishandled. At the time, in 1996, the *New York Times* stated that the Academy found "no conclusive and consistent evidence" linking EMFs to cancer. (When you see language like that you know the fix is in: How often does evidence meet such a strict burden of proof?) Left unsaid was that the Academy confirmed that children living near power lines had higher rates of leukemia. Savitz knows this too, he was the vice chair of the Academy panel.

Why have we made no progress in understanding the power line risk? There's a simple answer: No money for follow-up studies — even when promising leads were in hand. We wrote about one such lost opportunity earlier this year.

In July, a tobacco scientist writing in *Forbes* magazine took the *Times* to task for "reviving baseless fears" about power lines and cancer in what was little more than a look back at a 1989 feature. Now, it seems, the *Times* agrees with the industry denialists: Its own science editors were having a dumb retro moment last summer.

December 3, 2014

Andy Revkin Adds His Two Cents

A blog reporter at the *New York Times* has chimed in with support for the filmmakers at the RetroReport. Andy Revkin on his Dot Earth Blog takes Paul Brodeur, who wrote about the EMF issue in the *New Yorker* some years ago, to task for hyping the risk and helping cause a "public panic" as well as the TV networks for "enthusiastically" jumping on board.

Revkin writes that studies "hinted" at a childhood leukemia risk near power lines 25 years ago. Who then should we trust for honest and clear information on EMF risks? Revkin refers his audience to the IEEE for a balanced opinion. Not a word about the many follow-up studies, which turned that hint into a scientific consensus that power lines EMFs are a possbile human carcinogen, as we detailed above. We wonder whether Revkin is aware that he puts his faith in an IEEE document that was written by a group of industry and military loyalists. And to come full circle: Both Savitz and Moulder, the stars of the Retro video, played a part in the IEEE document.

Professor Tony Miller, who ran one of the largest occupational EMF studies ever, posted a comment on the *Times* Web site. He tells Revkin that "contrary to your story [the health risk from power lines]

is not non-existent." Miller advises that "when dealing with a possible human carcinogen, the precautionary principle should be applied."

Brodeur has raised the issue with the *Times'* Public Editor, Margaret Sullivan, who reviews the paper's "journalistic integrity." We spoke to him this morning and this is what he told us: "I consider it an outrageous breach of good journalistic practice that no one at the *New York Times* contacted me regarding my work on power line EMFs that appeared in the *New Yorker* where I was a staff writer for many years."

Joel Moskowitz of the UC Berkeley School of Public Health has also written to Sullivan. He calls Moulder's statement in the RetroReport —"In 20 years of looking, no one has found a way that power line fields can do anything at all in cells or animals"— "patently false."

December 12, 2014

Paul Brodeur Responds

Today, Paul Brodeur posted his response to the *New York Times*: "Conflicts of Interest in Coverage of a Health Issue by the *New York Times,*" on Huffington Post. Here are his closing paragraphs:

> "One might hope that in the future *The Times* will inform its readers regarding conflicts of interest in people it presents as reliable sources, so readers may make better-informed decisions about the information being transmitted to them.
>
> "Don't bet on it."

December 25, 2014

Confusion over AC and DC Fields

This morning's *NY Times* features a long story about a power line dispute in Germany. The contentious project, known as SuedLink, calls for 500 miles of new high voltage *direct current* (DC) lines to move wind energy from the northern to the southern parts of the country. Such DC lines do not generate the 50/60 Hz *alternating current* (AC) magnetic fields, which have been associated with childhood leukemia.

The story includes this parenthetical:

> (So far, most scientific studies have not found a significant threat. In 2006, the World Health Organization said static electric and magnetic fields had no adverse health impact, but public fears persist.)

While it is true that DC or static fields are seen as presenting much fewer health concerns than AC magnetic fields, the *Times* added a link from "public fears persist" on its Web site to the same Retro video story, which addressed the risks associated with AC fields. All this goes to show, once again, that the editors at the *Times* are clueless about what the EMF controversy is all about.

March 20, 2015

Take a look at what happens when a *Times* writer says there may be an EMF-related risk. It's a completely different story. See "Ignorance Drowns Out Precaution."

power lines, childhood leukemia, David Savitz, David Carpenter, John Moulder, New York Times, Margaret Sullivan, Paul Brodeur, Andrew Revkin, Joel Moskowitz, Germany, SuedLink,

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