MICRO WAVE NEWS

A Report on Non-Ionizing Radiation

French RF Research Program To Cut Its Links to the Mobile Phone Industry

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A consensus has emerged in France that the national RF research program should cut its ties to the mobile phone industry. Manufacturers and operators would however continue to help pay for health and environmental research. This new outlook emerged from a month-long (April 23–May 25) review (round table) of government policies on RF radiation with the participation of no fewer than three cabinet ministers —for health, environment and the digital economy.

The Foundation for Health and Radiofrequencies, founded in 2005, has run the French RF research and public information efforts under a five-year mandate and a budget of €4.8 million (~US$6.7 million), with equal contributions from government and industry. It has sponsored 26 projects including the French groups working on the Interphone and MOBI-Kids studies.

Now, the future of the Foundation is in doubt, at least under its present structure. In its final report, the members of the round table affirm the need for more research and for a research-coordinating group, but criticize the Foundation for having industry representatives —but none from citizen groups— on its Board of Directors. Alcatel-Lucent, Bouygues Telecom, Orange France, SFR and TDF all have seats of the board.

At the same time, the report proclaims the government's commitment to nurture a culture of precaution, to increase public information and to review health standards. It makes a special point that the needs of those who are electrosensitive must be addressed. The report covers a lot of other ground, notably policies on mobile phone towers and on the use of phones by children. They are all summarized in the government's ten-point program. (See also "Cell Phones & Kids," January 23.)

On July 7, Chantal Jouanno, the minister for the environment, announced the formation of a new committee to implement the recommendations of the round table, with its work to be completed by April 2010. Three days later, the committee's working group on research held its first meeting with Jocelyne Boudot of the Ministry of Health serving as its chair. No final decisions were made, according to Françoise Boudin, the director of the Foundation and a member of the working group. But there was agreement that some new entity was needed to coordinate RF research. "It cannot be the Foundation," Boudin told *Microwave News,* "because the board of directors should be independent from the industry." Jean-François Lacronique, the chairman of the Foundation's board of directors also sits on the working group.

A few days before the working group meeting, the Foundation's Scientific Advisory Committee issued a press release calling on the government to make a "strong commitment" to an independent and world-class RF research program. Without it, the committee threatened to resign *en masse* on October 22, immediately following its second scientific conference, which will be held in Paris, October 20-21. This threat now seems somewhat moot since whatever replaces the Foundation will no doubt pick its own science advisors.

Ironically, even though the Foundation's days appear to be numbered because of the board's links to industry, it enjoys more support from activists than from industry. "The Foundation is a genuine scientific agency," said Daniel Oberhausen, a physicist in Bordeaux, who is an advisor to Priartem, a national citizens' association with headquarters in Paris. "The future of French research is not yet clear," he told *Microwave News*. "In my opinion, a new foundation should be created, possibly at an international level." Priartem did not always look so favorably on the Foundation —some groups still don't— but came around on realizing that a dialogue between them was possible.

For its part, the industry became disenchanted with the Foundation after it made a series of strategic errors, for instance, alienating the scientific establishment by not consulting members of the Academy of Medicine, among other august bodies, and for spending too much money on research and not enough on public information.

In a July 10 interview with the *Journal de l'Environment,* a Web-based daily, Martine Hours, the chair of Foundation's Scientific Advisory Committee said that she is not opposed to a new organizational structure, but added that "no credible alternative has yet been proposed." She challenged the notion that the industry had had any influence on the Foundation's research agenda. Hours, an epidemiologist at INRETS, the French National Institute for Transport and Safety Research, leads the French Interphone group.

In the end, however, all this may be little more than a tempest in a teapot. Hours and the other members of the scientific advisory board question whether the government has the political will to raise the money for more research. If not, the call for a new

industry-free outfit to run the French RF program may simply be a red herring.

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