Kheifets To Study Cancer Cluster

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The University of California, San Diego (UCSD), campus is in an uproar over a cluster of cancer cases among those working in the university's Literature Building. Eight women who worked there developed breast cancer between 2000 and 2006, which is significantly more than would have been expected by chance, according to an analysis by Cedric Garland, a UCSD epidemiologist.

In his June 2008 report to UCSD Chancellor Marye Ann Fox, Garland devotes a lot of attention to the possible role played by EMFs, especially transients from the motors of the building's elevators. Garland recommends a strategy of "prudent avoidance," which he calls a "special case of the precautionary principle":

> The issue of the etiological role of EMF in breast cancer is still not resolved with final scientific certainty, despite decades of research. However, the lack of such certainty should not be a reason to avoid taking moderate measures to minimize needless exposure of workers to power frequency EMF.

The cluster is now being investigated by Leeka Kheifets, who has a position at UCLA and is closely associated with the Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI), an arm of the electric utility industry. In fact, Kheifets has spent most of her professional career either directly or indirectly working for EPRI. UCSD appears to have hired Kheifets on the recommendation of Emilie van Deventer of the WHO EMF Project in Geneva. van Deventer neglected to mention the EPRI connection to UCSD. Kheifets's report is expected in a couple of months.

Some, like Dennis Childs, a UCSD literature professor, have raised questions about Kheifets's independence from EPRI and the power industry. In response to these concerns, Kheifets "insisted on the organization's independence and emphasized that without the work of the EPRI, there would be scarce, if any, research on the

connection between cancer and EMF," according to an article in *The Guardian,* the UCSD campus newspaper.

This must not pass without comment. EPRI's track record on EMFs is a sordid one. It has served the interests of the electric utility industry at every turn by seeking to control EMF research. In the 30 years since Nancy Wertheimer and Ed Leeper first linked power line EMFs with childhood leukemia, EPRI has not sponsored a single study that has moved the field forward. Rather it has sought to slow research or stop it all together, and, whenever possible, implicate some agent other than EMFs. One example: Rather than follow-up the Wertheimer-Leeper findings, EPRI hired a consulting firm, run by Daniel Roth, to evaluate their work. He trashed it. This could not have been a surprise. Roth had previously done a similar hatchet job for EPRI on work on fine particles in the air and the risk of asthma attacks. (Roth later worked for the tobacco industry; see David Michaels's indispensable book, *Doubt Is Their Product.)* One of the two project managers for the Roth report was Rob Kavet. Twenty-five years later, Kavet is still at EPRI and now runs its EMF program.

Kheifets joined EPRI in 1988 and worked her way up to become the manager of the EMF program. In 2001, after five years in that job, she joined Mike Repacholi at the EMF project in Geneva (see *MWN,* M/J01, p.3). Even while at the WHO, Kheifets received support from EPRI (see our August 9, 2005 post). Since returning from Geneva, Kheifekidsts has renewed her close ties to EPRI.

Unlike UCSD's Garland, Kheifets has an ambivalent view of the precautionary principle. In early 2003, she and Repacholi announced that the WHO would apply the precautionary principle to EMFs (see *MWN,* M/A03, p.1). But soon afterwards they changed their minds and declined to follow through —many claimed that they had succumbed to industry pressure. Instead, Repacholi and Kheifets said that they would develop a "comprehensive risk management framework in which precaution plays at every stage" (see *MWN,* M/J03, p.1). This turned out to be a ruse. The framework was never completed and was later quietly shelved by WHO management. Six years later, the EMF project has yet to favor precaution for EMF exposures.

No one knows whether EMFs played a role in the UCSD cluster, but if the university wants a fair assessment, it should hire a disinterested expert.

Leeka Kheifets, EPRI, Michael Repacholi, Cedric Garland, WHO, cancer cluster, Daniel Roth,

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