



2013 Short Takes

Fudging Power Line Health Risks in Ireland

November 26, 2013

EirGrid, the Irish state-owned power line company, is planning to build three new 400 kV lines and to upgrade 2,000 km of existing power lines at a cost of €3.2 billion to help provide reliable service in the years to come. But there's nothing new about its approach to addressing the public's concerns about EMFs.

Take a look at [this new 35-minute "Prime Time" video](#) from RTÉ, a local TV station. It illustrates, once again, the double talk endemic to the EMF–health debate as well as the corrosive effect that [Mike Repacholi's EMF Project](#) at the World Health Organization (WHO) has had on public discourse of these risks.

[Fintan Slye](#), the CEO of EirGrid, sought to reassure those concerned about ill effects: "There is no way if there were any risks to health associated with what we are doing, that we would proceed with it." He added, "It is simply not possible" for power line EMFs to lead to cancer. [Bill Bailey of Exponent](#), a consultant to EirGrid, was flown in from the U.S. to sit in the studio audience and support Slye. The scientific evidence, he said, does not demonstrate a health risk from exposure to EMFs encountered in daily life.

Both Slye and Bailey specifically cited the conclusions of the WHO to support their claims. They must have been referring to Repacholi's EMF Project at WHO in Geneva, *not* the [International Agency for Research on Cancer](#), an agency of the WHO based in Lyon. Back in 2001, IARC designated ELF EMFs as a 2B human carcinogen, that is, exposure to EMFs presents a possible cancer risk. That decision was based on epidemiological studies of children living near power lines (see [our coverage](#)).

Bailey knows all about this because he was a member of the IARC panel that reviewed all the scientific evidence in Lyon. The IARC decision was unanimous. There is no record that Bailey dissented. Bailey was then and is now an industry consultant. He would be

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[2026 Short Takes](#) [2017 Short Takes](#)
[2025 Short Takes](#) [2016 Short Takes](#)
[2024 Short Takes](#) [2015 Short Takes](#)
[2023 Short Takes](#) [2014 Short Takes](#)
[2022 Short Takes](#) [2013 Short Takes](#)
[2021 Short Takes](#) [2012 Short Takes](#)
[2020 Short Takes](#) [2011 Short Takes](#)
[2019 Short Takes](#) [2010 Short Takes](#)
[2018 Short Takes](#)

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[ElektrosmogReport Now in English Too](#)

[NCI 'Cancer Bioelectricity' Conference](#)

[Another WHO RF Review Challenged](#)

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disqualified from sitting on an IARC panel today. (If you doubt us, just ask [Anders Ahlbom](#).)

Repacholi was also at the Lyon meeting, as an observer. He then spent years trying to undermine that decision for his many [industry supporters](#). As soon as he left the WHO, Repacholi abandoned all pretense and hung out a shingle [as a corporate consultant](#).

Luckily, the TV audience in the studio was well informed and knew that Slye and Bailey were fudging. The jeers tell the story.

Even EirGrid must have gotten the message. A couple of days after the show aired, the company announced that it would now consider placing the power lines underground, according to the [Sunday Independent](#), Ireland's most widely read newspaper. The fact that people have started pelting politicians with eggs must have helped too.

For a copy of the IARC panel's report on the cancer risks from ELF EMFs, [click here](#).

U.K. Acoustic Neuroma Link Fades Away

After Data from 2009-11 Added

October 6, 2013

Updated October 8, 2013

The research group at the University of Oxford that reported a link between long-term use of a mobile phone and an [elevated risk of acoustic neuroma](#) (AN) in May now says that it is no longer there. In a short [letter to the International Journal of Epidemiology \(IJE\)](#), the Oxford team advises that when the analysis was repeated with data from 2009-2011, "there is no longer a significant association." Also gone, the team writes, is the "significant trend in risk with duration of use."

After ten or more years of phone use, the risk of AN is now only 17% higher with a confidence interval (0.60-2.27) that indicates the small increase is not significant. In their [earlier paper](#), the Oxford group reported that the AN tumor risk more than doubled after ten years and was statistically significant (RR = 2.46, CI = 1.07–5.64).

The update comes in response to a [letter](#) from [Frank de Vocht](#) of the U.K.'s University of Manchester expressing surprise that the Oxford team had not included the finding of the AN risk in its original published abstract —especially given that it "provides further support" for the IARC decision to classify [RF radiation as a possible human carcinogen](#).

In his letter to *IJE*, de Vocht includes the results of an informal meta-analysis he carried out on studies of long-term use of mobile phones and the incidence of AN:

"As shown, the accumulated scientific evidence remains inconclusive, but does indicate a 14 - 43% summary

increased risk of acoustic neuroma because of long-term (10+ years) use of mobile phones, although without reaching statistical significance (95% CI = 0.76–2.67)."

It is too soon to know how the latest data from the Oxford study would affect de Vocht's meta-analysis.

October 8, 2013

Frank de Vocht has —quickly— [updated his meta-analysis](#) to take into account the new Oxford data. He now finds a non-significant 18% increase of AN among long-term users. (A relative risk of 1.18 with a 95% CI = 0.67-2.08.)

This may be an underestimate. de Vocht did not take into account a [Japanese study](#) which showed that those who used cell phones for more than 20 minutes a day for at least five years had three times more acoustic neuromas than expected. (See [our report](#).) The Japanese results are not presented in the same way as those in the other studies and may not be easily integrated.

Hardell Group Reaffirms Wireless Phone Tumor Risks But Not for Meningioma

September 25, 2013

Updated September 27, 2013

Using a new data set covering 2007-2009, Lennart Hardell and his research team have reaffirmed their previous findings that long-term use of a wireless phone leads to higher rates of both malignant brain tumors and acoustic neuromas (AN), but not of meningiomas, a type of benign brain tumor. In general, they report, the longer the use, the greater the risk for AN and malignant brain tumors.

All three new papers are open access. For the malignant brain tumor paper, [click here](#); for the AN paper, [click here](#), and for the meningioma paper, [click here](#).

An excerpt from the brain tumor paper:

"In summary, our results are consistent with an early effect in carcinogenesis (initiator) by analogue mobile phones, and both an early (initiator) and late (promoter) effect by wireless phones of the digital type."

One from the acoustic neuroma paper:

"The risk increased with time since first use. For use of both mobile and cordless phones the risk was highest in the longest latency group. Tumor volume increased per 100 h of cumulative use and years of latency for wireless phones."

And one from the meningioma paper:

"The present results strengthen our previous findings of an increased risk for glioma and acoustic neuroma, since a systematic bias in those studies would have been expected also in this study of meningioma using the same methodology. An indication of increased risk for meningioma was seen in the group with highest cumulative use but was not supported by statistically significant increasing risk with latency."

Brundtland Responds: Rarely Uses a Cell Phone

Her PC Is Cabled, Not Wireless

July 1, 2013

Updated August 15, 2015

Gro Harlem Brundtland very rarely uses a cell phone, contrary to the impression promoted by the Norwegian Minister of Health that she is no longer electrosensitive, according to a message from Brundtland herself. Brundtland, a medical doctor, is a former prime minister of Norway and was the director of the WHO from 1998 to 2003.

"In her daily work, Gro Harlem Brundtland uses a PC with a cabled, not wireless, Internet connection. Second, she uses a mobile device—a Blackberry—for e-mail. She avoids speaking on cell phones, but has done so a very small number of times," reads a statement released by Brundtland's press assistant over the weekend. The message was sent to Thomas Ergo, a reporter for *Aftenbladet*, a Norwegian newspaper, who broke the story late last week. (See also [our report](#).)

"Brundtland's comments are the first time she has talked to the press about her electrosensitivity in 11 years," Ergo noted in an e-mail to *Microwave News*.

Ergo's follow-up article on Brundtland ran in *Aftenbladet* yesterday under the headline, "[I Avoid Talking on Mobile Phones](#)."

Ergo asked Jonas Gahr Støre, the health minister, whether he had misrepresented Brundtland in an effort to promote government policy that RF radiation is safe and causes no ill effects. Støre denied the charge, adding that his views on RF are based on the scientific advice he receives.

Støre was referring to a [report of an expert committee](#), released last November, which concluded in part: "The large total number of studies provides no evidence that exposure to weak RF fields causes adverse health effects." The 16 members of the committee include some well-known members of the RF research community including: Norway's Lars Klæboe, Gunnhild Oftedal and Tore Tynes as well as Sweden's Maria Feychting, Yngve Hamnerius and Lena Hillert.

At the time, Ergo asked how the government could assure the public that RF radiation was safe after the IARC decision that it was

a possible human carcinogen. The chairman of the panel, Jan Alexander, told Ergo that "a fairly large minority [of the IARC committee] disagreed with the conclusion." As for Interphone study, Alexander said that it is only a single study pointing to a tumor risk. Alexander is the deputy director-general of the Norwegian Institute of Public Health.

In fact, the IARC decision was nearly unanimous and was based on both the Interphone and the Lennart Hardell studies —though many members of the Norwegian expert panel, especially the Swedes, are openly hostile to Hardell and his work.

In May of this year, the Norwegian department of health and human services released its own report whose conclusions were identical to those of its expert committee. The headline on that news story was: "Government: Mobile Radiation Does Not Harm or Bother You."

For more on the Norwegian expert panel and Brundtland's electrosensitivity, see *Ergo's article in Plot*, published last year, and our coverage.

August 15, 2015

In a 45-minute interview spanning a wide array of topics, Brundtland once again addresses her electrosensitivity. The headline in yesterday's *Aftenposten*, reads, in English, "My Body Has Responded to Mobile Radiation for 25 Years." She advises people not to carry their phones in their pockets.

Brundtland Now Using a Cell Phone So Says Norwegian Health Minister

June 28, 2013

The world's best-known electrosensitive, Gro Harlem Brundtland, is now using a mobile phone, according to a former top aide. The news, which will likely undermine the credibility of this controversial condition, was reported today by Thomas Ergo in the Norwegian newspaper *Aftenbladet*. Ergo quotes Jonas Gahr Støre, the minister of health, saying that these days Brundtland talks on a cell phone and surfs the Internet.

Brundtland, a medical doctor who served as the prime minister of Norway for ten years, led the World Health Organization from 1998 to 2003. While she was at the WHO, she banned the use of cell phones in her office because, she said, they gave her headaches. For the most part, she declined to be interviewed about her electrosensitivity. Støre worked for Brundtland at WHO in Geneva and later became the Norwegian minister of foreign affairs.

Last year, Ergo published a detailed article on Brundtland's condition and Michael Repacholi's skepticism that such a condition exists. Repacholi has blamed Brundtland for contributing to people's fears of RF radiation. Repacholi served under Brundtland

when he was the head of the WHO's [EMF Project](#). He retired in 2006.

Støre told Ergo that he does not mean to imply that electrosensitivity does not exist. It is "arrogant" not to take people seriously, he said. On the other hand, the minister has also recently stated that RF does not harm people or cause electrosensitivity, Ergo told *Microwave News*.

Up to half a million Norwegians consider themselves to be electrosensitive and affected by radiation, according to Ergo.

IARC Publishes Rationale for RF as Possible Human Carcinogen

Two-Year Gestation

April 19, 2013

Updated November 25, 2015

The International Agency for Research on Cancer ([IARC](#)) has released its detailed evaluation of the cancer risks associated with RF radiation, which serves as the rationale for designating RF as a possible human carcinogen.

The IARC monograph comes close to two years after an invited panel of experts from 14 countries reached this conclusion following an eight-day meeting at IARC headquarters in Lyon, France (see [our report](#)).

An electronic copy of the [430-page document](#) is available at no cost from IARC. A paper copy will be available soon.

The basis for IARC designation of RF as a Class 2B carcinogen is summed up in one sentence: "Positive associations have been observed between exposure to radiofrequency radiation from wireless phones and glioma and acoustic neuroma" (p.421). Those associations with brain tumors and tumors of the acoustic nerve were observed by the [Interphone](#) study group and [Lennart Hardell's](#) team in Sweden.

The panel's decision was close to unanimous. One strong dissent came from [Peter Inskip](#) of the U.S. National Cancer Institute, who walked out of the IARC meeting before the final vote. One or two others, including [Maria Blettner](#) of the University of Mainz in Germany, were reported to have also disagreed with the majority opinion. There was talk that the dissenters would file a minority opinion, but no signed statement appears in the IARC monograph. Instead, their view is included in the final paragraph of the report: The available evidence does not support a "conclusion about a causal association" due to "inconsistencies" between the Interphone and Hardell studies and the lack of an exposure-response relationship.

The dissenters also point to a lack of association in a large Danish study—though this effort has been widely criticized (see [our take](#)).

Finally, the dissenters argue that, "up to now, reported time trends in incidence rates of glioma have not shown a trend parallel to time trends in mobile-phone use." That last argument was punctured in November when the Danish Cancer Society [reported a spike in aggressive brain tumors](#) over the last ten years. At the time, an insider called the increase a "frightening development," though no link to cell phones was made.

FCC Begins Review of Its RF Safety Rules

March 29, 2013
Updated June 4, 2013

Today, the FCC —finally— issued a [package of rules and requests for information](#) related to RF health and safety. We say finally because the commission announced that this was on its way last June (see ["What's Up at the FCC?"](#)). No one at the FCC is eager to say why it took so long, except that it covers a lot of ground.

The document is indeed long (over 200 pages) and complex. There are some new final rules; for instance, the pinna is now officially an "extremity" and subject to a much looser SAR limit (see ¶42). And, there are some new proposed rules; for instance, a blanket exemption for all transmitters with a power output of 1 mW or less (see ¶121). But none of these is a major change.

The heart of the document is a Notice of Inquiry (NOI) to help the FCC determine whether it should reassess its RF exposure limits. This is just about what the [GAO recommended](#) last summer that the FCC do with respect to cell phones.

One of the key issues on the table is whether there is a need for precautionary policies, specifically to protect children (see ¶¶5-7 and ¶¶236-243):

[W]e ask whether any precautionary action would be either useful or counterproductive, given that there is a lack of scientific consensus about the possibility of adverse health effects at exposure levels at or below our existing limits. [¶6]

Comments and reply comments will now be submitted to the FCC over the next six months. Then the commission will mull them all over. And perhaps sometime in the future it will issue a new set of rules. No one should expect anything to happen very quickly. After all the FCC's last RF safety proposal came out ten years ago.

June 4, 2013

The FCC's [new](#) and [proposed](#) rules were published in the *Federal Register* today. Comments on the proposal are due by September 3, and reply comments by November 1, 2013.

