The Attack on Cell Phones, Redialed

By ACSH Staff — February 15, 2005

A recent article [1] in London’s Evening Standard claimed that research completed by the Irish Doctors Environmental Association (IDEA) found the first proof that cell phones cause health problems, but is this research we can rely on? The doctors ignore the lessons learned from previous research along these lines. In September of 2004, researchers in Sweden found links between cell phone usage and acoustic neuroma. The studies were flawed but created a scare nonetheless.

Researchers at IDEA gathered sixteen participants for the new study and tracked them over a few months. They documented their cell phone usage and had numerous medical tests done. Thirteen of these participants suffered from nausea, headaches, and dizziness, which the doctors were quick to connect to cell phone radiation.

These sixteen people were chosen, the study stated, because they were “sensitive to electromagnetic radiation,” but what does this even mean? (Editor’s note: IDEA officially takes the position [2], described as scientifically groundless in previous [3] FactsAndFears articles [4], that a growing number of people are experiencing health problems caused by electromagnetism; the group also blames fluoridation of water for numerous ills yet has largely been taken seriously by mainstream press.) Are they bothered by the same symptoms when they watch TV, listen to the radio, or stand by the microwave? The number of participants is not big enough to constitute any kind of comprehensive study, and it seems that their complaints, if taken seriously, would not even demonstrate a direct connection to cell phone usage, regardless of the links IDEA would like to find. The subjects’ nausea and headaches may have more to do with who is on the other end of the phone, or on the TV for that matter, than with the machines themselves.

As if to add to the hysteria, Dr. Michael Maier of Imperial College, according to the Scottish paper The Courier [5], theorizes that cell phones might cause problems, saying “the brain is an electrical instrument, and the frequency of radiation produced is very close to that used in the brain.” He concludes that cell phone frequencies therefore interfere with the frequency of the brain. But there is no specific frequency of the brain, so the claim is specious.

The Evening Standard article notes the expert advice not to give cell phones to children under eight years old because of the health risks. They’d do better to warn readers to beware of organizations with shaky scientific premises and shakier studies.

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