

PRESSURE ON GOVERNMENT TO BAN BUILDING NEAR POWER LINES AS REPORT NAMES “BEST AVAILABLE OPTION”

Leading children's cancer charity CHILDREN with LEUKAEMIA welcomes the publication today of the SAGE report, which it feels leaves Government little option but respond immediately with a commitment to substantive precautionary action. The report was officially published simultaneously on the SAGE website and the websites of the 3 funders of the process; the Department of Health, National Grid and CHILDREN with LEUKAEMIA.

The report concludes that a ban on building new homes and schools near power lines is the “best available option” for obtaining a significant reduction in exposure to power frequency EMFs and urges Government to make “a clear decision on whether to implement this option or not”.

The Minister for Public Health, Caroline Flint MP has been under pressure to introduce a moratorium on new building near power lines since the 2005 publication of the Department of Health funded ‘Draper Report’, which found that children who lived within 200 metres of high voltage lines had a 70 per cent higher risk of developing leukaemia than those who lived more than 600 metres away. Ms Flint has said that she would await the publication of the SAGE report and is now under intense pressure to respond with Government plans.

CHILDREN with LEUKAEMIA CEO, Edward Copisarow, said “The principle finding of the report is that Government must now decide whether we are to have substantive precaution - the SAGE process has been successful in determining what precautionary measures are required if we want to save young lives and now the pressure is on Government to implement them.

Copisarow continues “Power lines near homes and schools are a problem – we have to stop the problem getting any worse. We urge Government to issue a planning circular that will prevent power lines and houses and schools being built in close proximity.”

For a full copy of the report from 2pm, 27 April 2007, please go onto www.leukaemia.org or <http://www.rkpartnership.co.uk>

A full copy of the report has been delivered to Caroline Flint MP, prior to publication. CHILDREN with LEUKAEMIA will be calling for a statement/reaction on Friday 27 April 2007.

CHILDREN with LEUKAEMIA is a funder of the SAGE process (together with the Department of Health and National Grid) which began in November 2004 to examine and report to Government on practical recommendations to adopt a precautionary approach on exposure to electric and magnetic fields.

ENDS

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Notes to editors

1. CHILDREN with LEUKAEMIA is Britain's leading charity dedicated exclusively to the conquest of childhood leukaemia through pioneering research, new treatment and support of leukaemic children and their families.
2. An Early Day Motion demanding that the Government supports CHILDREN with LEUKAEMIA's call for an immediate moratorium on new homes being built near power lines has the support of 223 backbench MPs.

3. Power lines and/or exposure to EMF have also been linked with a number of other serious health conditions including depression, miscarriage, adult brain cancer and the degenerative brain disease, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis.

SAGE Briefing

SAGE is the Stakeholder Advisory Group on Extremely Low Frequency Electric and Magnetic Fields (EMF). It was formed in 2004 following a recommendation from the HPA for Government to consider the need for precautionary measures to reduce public exposure to EMF.

The SAGE Report was drawn up for Government by a group of 40 stakeholders, including scientists, representatives from the electricity industry, campaigners and government officials over the last three years. The SAGE process has been funded equally by the electricity industry, Department of Health and the charity CHILDREN with LEUKAEMIA.

In 2005, the Department of Health funded 'Draper Report' (published in the BMJ) found that children who lived within 200 metres of high voltage power lines had a 70 per cent higher risk of developing leukaemia than those who lived more than 600 metres away. Some scientists have suggested that other illnesses, including brain tumours and motor neurone disease could also be linked to EMF exposure.

The Report considered a number of options for reducing exposure to EMF from sources including high voltage power lines, household wiring and appliances around the home.

To reduce both magnetic and electric fields from household wiring, the Report issues a package of recommendations, including an amendment to the IET guidance to electricians, changing the way in which houses are wired. The report also discusses EMF measurements in the home as part of the new Home Buyer's Information Pack.

On electrical appliances, the Report recommends that the HPA publish information to warn the public of the potential risks of prolonged EMF exposure and suggest measures they can take to reduce exposures in the home. These include simple things such as keeping children's beds away from meter cupboards, fuse boxes and transformers.

SAGE also considered a number of options to reduce fields from high voltage power lines (which account for around 50% of all high EMF readings in homes). The Report identified a ban on the building of new homes and schools within 60 metres of high voltage power lines and the building of new power lines within 60 metres of homes and schools as the "best available option for obtaining significant exposure reduction". SAGE urges Government to make "a clear decision on whether to implement this option or not". This option could most simply be implemented by the Government issuing a new planning circular. Much of the work for the Government Regulatory Impact Assessment needed for this is contained within the SAGE Report.

SAGE also recommends that the public be informed of the potential risks of exposure to EMF and that the electricity industry balance certain high voltage lines to reduce the radius and intensity of these fields.

The SAGE process will continue, with stakeholders turning their attention next to EMFs from lower voltage 132kV distribution lines, electricity substations near homes and electric trains.