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06/01/2015 - EESC calling for action on behalf of EHS sufferers

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A key high-level EU advisory body which formally advises the European Parliament and European Commission, is in the final stage of drafting their 'opinion' regarding actions that are needed to address the issue of Electromagnetic Hypersensitivity (EHS).



European Economic and Social Committee

It meets to complete the draft on 7th January and this will go to a plenary meeting on 21st January 2015 to finalise and hopefully issue the formal opinion. Powerwatch welcomes and supports this initiative.

The section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society ([TEN](#), within the [European Economic and Social Committee \(EESC\)](#)) has produced a draft opinion (currently on the third draft) on Electromagnetic Hypersensitivity, showing considerable progress on how they view the condition and what actions are warranted to minimise the negative impact it has on public society.

According to latest estimates, between 3% and 5% of the population are electro-sensitive, meaning that some 13 million Europeans may suffer from this syndrome, which has various names (electro-sensitivity, Wi-Fi syndrome, microwave syndrome, electromagnetic hypersensitivity, etc).

We reproduce below some numbered paragraphs from the document:

Recognition of EMF caused symptoms

2.1 » In recent years, adverse health effects have been attributed to growing exposure to electromagnetic waves in our daily life. In some ways, the current problem harks back to the question of asbestos and its use in building: initially, "irrefutable scientific evidence" was demanded, with serious scientific differences subsequently emerging, and the danger to health posed by the material eventually being recognised.

2.2 » It is now believed that electromagnetic hypersensitivity syndrome, which is one aspect of what is known as Idiopathic Environmental Intolerance (IEI), attributed to electromagnetic fields (EMFs) from such everyday devices as mobile phones and Wi-Fi, can lead to permanent disability since there are reasonable indications that it could cause anatomical and functional disorders for sufferers to the point that it limits or prevents their capacity to work.

2.3 » Through their recommendations, international organisations like the Council of Europe or the WHO have established the existence of electromagnetic hypersensitivity as a health condition that can prevent people from exercising an occupational activity.

2.4 » Since 1930, so many studies have been published by universities from across the world that in 2011 the WHO acknowledged high frequency electromagnetic fields as potential cancer risks, as it had already done for low frequency magnetic fields. However, there is still no scientific consensus on the matter.

3.1 » The possible symptoms include headaches, chronic fatigue, recurring infections, difficulties concentrating, memory loss, inexplicable unhappiness, dermatological symptoms, irritability or sleeplessness, heart problems, poor blood circulation, disorientation, nasal congestion, reduced libido, thyroid disorders, eye discomfort, tinnitus, increased need to urinate, listlessness, capillary fragility, cold hands and feet, and stiff muscles. These may occur or get worse in the vicinity of electrical appliances, transformers, mobile phone antennas and other sources of radiation.

3.2 » However, people affected by electromagnetic waves display no symptoms whatsoever when not exposed to electromagnetic fields. This leads to the conclusion that any recurring radiation-induced conditions that diminish or disappear when the sufferer moves away from the source constitute electromagnetic hypersensitivity, even when according to some doctors, scientific evidence of a direct causal link is lacking. The present opinion addresses the implications of their situation for those affected rather than its causes.

3.3 » Electromagnetic hypersensitivity sufferers experience a serious deterioration in their quality of life, not only because of the physical symptoms it usually entails, but also because their lives are totally disrupted by their need to avoid further exposure. In practice, it means that they not only have to avoid almost all public facilities such as transport, hospitals and libraries, but even their own homes, in order to escape adverse health effects, which is a breach of rights that are enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

5.1 » There are different levels of electromagnetic hypersensitivity. The reversible forms are the mild forms of electrical sensitivity. Long-term exposure can increase people's sensitivity to the initial frequencies (e.g. telephone masts).

5.2 » Subsequently, and as the syndrome develops, they also become sensitive to other sources of electromagnetic radiation (such as Wi-Fi routers, computers or fluorescent light tubes).



This is as thorough an overview of the causes and symptoms of EHS as we've seen from an official body, including the difficulties that sufferers face when attempting to have their poor health successfully diagnosed. It also outlines the difficulties that sufferers face, with particular note to the lack of access to public facilities and transport as a breach of their human rights as defined by the EU and also by the UN Declaration of Human Rights.

Demand for more action

1.5 » The EU should assist currently affected groups and limit exposure fields in light of the recommendations set out in this opinion, especially with respect to recognising this exposure as a cause of functional disability and environmental illness. Steps should also be taken to prevent the number of sufferers from gradually increasing in the future due to the expansion of devices using these technologies.

2.8 » There are more and more people suffering from electromagnetic and environmental hypersensitivity syndrome. In addition, these people may sometimes suffer the incomprehension and scepticism of doctors who do not deal with the problem professionally. That is why measures to stem the increase in the numbers of those affected and prevent those suffering becoming socially excluded are so important.

5.4 » With regard to occupational health, it is important not to exclude any category of workers and the loopholes in EU legislation relating to occupational exposure to electromagnetic fields need to be closed. Groups who were not previously exposed to these risks are becoming increasingly concerned due to the increase in wireless installations in office buildings, making it necessary to adopt measures to mitigate the impact of continuous exposure. Most cases of electromagnetic hypersensitivity syndrome are work-related, although other trends are currently emerging due to the widespread introduction of mobile phones and Wi-Fi.

5.5 » Protecting workers' health from the risk of long-term effects is a concern: given the lack of what is termed "conclusive scientific data" - although some scientific research confirms that EMFs have adverse biological effects on workers - the public authorities need to adopt measures to

avoid them. As the EESC has previously argued, more transparency and independence is required concerning the activities of scientists belonging to the bodies responsible for setting maximum exposure levels in order to guarantee their objectivity.

8.1.1 » The EESC believes that the EU should assist current sufferers and take steps to limit exposure fields in order to prevent the number of sufferers from gradually increasing in the future due to the expansion of devices using these technologies. It also supports the creation of white zones as an emergency measures for people worst affected by this syndrome.

8.2.4 » Particular attention should be paid to "electrosensitive" persons suffering from an EMF or environmental intolerance syndrome and specific measures should be introduced to protect them, such as recognition of the illness in various sectors, namely:

- *health sector*: recognition of the illness of electromagnetic hypersensitivity as an EMF intolerance syndrome;
- *employment sector*: recognition of hypersensitivity as an illness and adaptation measures;
- *social sector*: recognition of the functional disability.

8.2.6 » Systems for evaluating, preventing and managing risks in the workplace due to electromagnetic pollution also need to be improved through the proactive adoption of appropriate measures to mitigate, neutralise or eradicate it wherever necessary.

8.2.7 » Information and dissemination measures for the general public could include:

- establishing a register of products entailing electromagnetic risks, given their potential for causing electromagnetic hypersensitivity;
- designing information and awareness-raising campaigns on the prevention and management of problems associated with this condition that mainly target people with compatible profiles and particular long-term vulnerability to electromagnetic fields and which explain the potential negative long-term biological risks for the environment and human health, with particular reference to children;
- raising awareness of the potential health risks of DECT wireless phones, baby monitors, and other household appliances that continually emit microwave pulses, such as electrical equipment that is left permanently on standby, and recommending the use of fixed corded telephones at home.

8.5 » Electromagnetic safety thresholds for the use of products should be regulated and rules concerning the planning of electric power lines and relay antenna base stations should be established by adopting legislation on:

- a safe distance between high-voltage power lines and other electrical installations and homes;
- maximum permissible exposure levels and effective and transparent control mechanisms;
- requirement for spatial planning tools to include public and private EMF-free zones (i.e. "white" zones, which would have to include housing, and public spaces that were free of electromagnetic pollution, such as health centres, hospitals, libraries, workspaces, etc.).



The calls for action in these sections represent an unprecedented level of consideration for people suffering from EHS in Europe. We are expecting very strong industry opposition in the upcoming plenary debate, as it represents an international recognition and acceptance of the syndrome, and we sincerely hope that the message contained in this third draft is not diluted as a result.

Recognition in other countries

2.6 » There are court decisions in some Member States (Spain and Italy, for example) recognising electromagnetic and environmental hypersensitivity as grounds for declaring total and permanent work disability. Some countries consider it to be an occupational illness whereas others treat it as a functional disability.

2.7 » Furthermore, on 3 March 2012, the Austrian Medical Association published guidelines for the diagnosis and treatment of electromagnetic hypersensitivity, in the context of "EMF-related health problems and illnesses".



Actions in three countries in Europe have already recognised EHS as a condition that deserves specific attention, two of which consider it a serious enough issue to render an individual incapable of working. This is considerable progress for sufferers, and sets the precedent for others to follow, particularly if this opinion is viewed favourably by the European Commission.

Conflicts of interest in scientific bodies

Section 1.3 » Due to the serious differences in scientific opinion, not to mention the possible existence of conflicts of interest among the members of the scientific bodies involved in establishing maximum exposure levels, the independence of these bodies must be reinforced.



This is the first time we have seen a significant inter-governmental body explicitly raise the issue regarding the apparent lack of impartiality of the main EMF guidance setting bodies such as ICNIRP. We have already commented this month on the damage that is caused by this [lack of balance](#), which has existed ever since Mike Repacholi created the partially industry-funded EMF project under the auspices of the World Health Organisation in 1996.

Links

- » [European Economic and Social Committee \(EESC\) website](#)
- » [Future agenda](#) for the section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN)
- » Third draft of the [TEN-559 opinion on electromagnetic hypersensitivity](#)