

02/03/2015 - New SCENIHR opinion on EMFs

The release of the latest 2015 SCENIHR Opinion (due this week) on the potential health effects of electromagnetic fields is likely to be used by governments and industry as a new "gold standard opinion" on the current state of EMF science, particularly in Europe. At present all we have is the November 2013 draft for public consultation which contains many omissions, errors and some examples of what we consider to be mis-information. We believe that the final version of this Opinion will still be significantly flawed, especially with regard to electrical hypersensitivity (EHS).



We will give a detailed public response when we have a chance to check the published version.

JOURNALISTS: In return for an early copy of the SCENIHR Press Release and Opinion we would be pleased to discuss our detailed concerns with you.

Despite being an official body of the European Commission and receiving healthy funding each year, the process itself seems to have weak methodology and approach to reviewing science compared to some other organisations such as IARC (though IARC only review cancer as a health outcome). Below we discuss a few of the issues with the way the SCENIHR group has produced its opinion.

The SCENIHR process

Sadly, as is the case with many committees setting standards and providing official review documents on EMF science, the SCENIHR experts selection process is "by invitation only" from people on a European Commission "[approved experts database](#)".

We requested a list of the "approved experts" but were told by the SCENIHR Secretariat that the list "was confidential and not for public viewing". The European Ombudsman produced a strong report in January 2015 criticising the secrecy that still surrounds the powerful experts groups called upon to help the European Commission draft EU legislation. According to Emily O'Reilly from the Ombudsman such practices "must end". She stated: "There is room for improvement if we want to be sure that the public can trust and scrutinise the work of these important groups". In a letter to EU commission president Jean-Claude Juncker, she also wrote: "The fact that the same organisation may be labelled differently in different expert groups is difficult to comprehend".

The expert groups are regarded as highly influential in shaping EU legislation in its early stages. Companies spend millions of euros lobbying Brussels' institutions and having direct access to an expert group is seen as one of the best ways of shaping legislation. In a 2014 report, Pro-transparency group Corporate Europe Observatory revealed big companies had scientists issuing opinions in expert groups on toxic chemicals they themselves manufactured. The problem was also highlighted in an expert group on tax where some of the 'independent' experts were currently employed by accountancy firms Deloitte, Ernst & Young, KPMG, and PwC.

While the Commission pleads that it tries to make the groups as balanced "as far as possible", O'Reilly has [called on the balance](#) to be mandatory and legally binding. She also [asks that the EC should reply to her proposals](#) by 30 April 2015.

The current secretive system leads to a very closed process, as people have a natural habit of preferring to only include those who agree with their own position, coined by Dariusz Leszczynski as [the buddy system](#), where the status quo continues beyond its shelf life simply because only those with a similar viewpoint and interpretation of the science are included in the process.

In the case of the 2015 EMF review, a single SCENIHR committee member was in charge of steering the process. He was responsible for selecting the experts responsible for assisting him in producing the opinion. Nine of the ten selected experts have been involved with standards committees in the past who have repeatedly underplayed evidence that pointed to any health effects (most notably ICNIRP, WHO-EMF Project and the UK's AGNIR). An updated opinion from such a group is likely to be consistent with the opinions they've held in the past; i.e. that a couple of outstanding questions remain uncertain regarding health effects from exposure to electromagnetic fields - so we should have some more research, but that the vast majority of asserted effects are unrelated to low levels of electromagnetic field exposure.

IARC comparison

In contrast, the World Health Organisation's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) is probably the most critically robust review body at the moment. Not only are a wide number of experts in the relevant field brought together, *explicitly including those with divergent opinions*, but the final decision and classification is decided on and voted as a group. It is not possible for a single person with a strong opinion to simply put pen to paper and produce a conclusion, years of effort are spent collecting the research to assess, and the whole group then discusses the literature in some detail over at least a week before the voting takes place.

We note that none of the 30 expert members of the IARC monograph committee in 2011 on radio frequency electromagnetic fields, who classified exposure to it as a 2B, possible human carcinogen, were included among the SCENIHR 'experts' used to write the new document. The result of only including scientists from one side of a controversial debate is that the final document is likely to be less balanced and not reflect the proper variety of academic interpretations of the science.

Links

- » [SCENIHR](#) website
- » EC [database of experts](#)
- » Dariusz Leszczynski's [criticism](#) of the SCENIHR membership selection process