Public health: limitation of exposure of the general public to electromagnetic fields 0Hz-300GHz. Recommendation

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This report is the second implementation report (2002-2007) on the application of Council recommendation of 12 July 1999 (1999/519/EC) on the limitation of the exposure of the general public to electromagnetic fields ((0 Hz to 300 GHz). It purpose is to provide a EU framework for national policies and measures to ensure a high level of protection of the population and for EU legislation and standards on EMF exposure from electric/electronic products and devices.

The public is exposed to electromagnetic fields (EMF) generated by an increasing variety of electrical and electronic devices and installations. EMF may have biological effects under certain conditions. It is the Member States' responsibility to protect the populations from potential health risks.

The Council Recommendation has established a set of basic restrictions and reference levels to provide guidance to the Member States and to create a basis for EU product safety legislation. They are as laid down by the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP). The Recommendation invites the Commission to keep the possible health effects of EMF under review. In 2002, the Commission presented its first report. This is the second one, relating to the situation in EU-27, based on the information received from the Member States, and presenting an update on initiatives taken by the Commission to review the available scientific knowledge.

To ensure that the Recommendation remains based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence, it is reviewed periodically. In 2007, the Scientific Committee on Emerging and Newly Identified Health Risks (SCENIHR) reviewed the scientific knowledge on potential health effects of EMF and found no consistent scientific evidence showing a need for revising the basic restrictions and reference levels set out in the Council Recommendation. Nevertheless, the SCENIHR identified gaps in the relevant scientific knowledge and areas where further research is needed, both at the national and European levels. The SCENIHR recommendations have already started to be reflected in the calls under the 7th Framework Programme for Research.

The European Commission has monitored the implementation of the Council Recommendation in the Member States. Most of them have implemented it either via legislative acts or decrees or via voluntary recommendations. In general, measures in countries where the Council Recommendation is not yet fully implemented are being improved. However, specific implementation measures vary significantly between countries.

A Eurobarometer survey on citizens' perception of the EMF issue shows considerable dissatisfaction in terms of information and communication. Most people would like to receive more information on the potential health effects of EMF through the TV, press and radio, while today most of this information is provided through Internet sites and specialist publications.

On another level, the Commission has also established a working group of government experts to improve the exchange of information and identify ways of improving coordination and cooperation between Member States. This group will support the initiatives of the Commission to strengthen the research on exposure of the general public and on potential health effects and to identify which aspects of the Recommendation require more effort.

In conclusion, the Commission intends to continue monitoring closely the application of this Recommendation, promoting the development of scientific knowledge on key aspects of the potential health impact of EMF, re-assess the validity of the Recommendation in the light of any relevant new scientific development and take appropriate action should the need arise.