

Secretariat

The Project is managed at WHO, Geneva. The Secretariat facilitates activities and provides reports to the IAC and contributors to the Project. WHO Regional Offices participate and facilitate communications with countries in their region.

SCIENTIFIC ACTIVITIES

Scientific Review Meetings

- Scientific review meetings are held to:
- ▶ review the status of the science
 - ▶ identify gaps in knowledge
 - ▶ promote focused research in areas that improve health risk assessments
- Outputs from the meetings:
- ▶ proceedings of the scientific review meetings
 - ▶ working group reports giving the status of the science, gaps in knowledge and a prioritized research agenda

Risk issues

People with little understanding of the health risks of EMF exposure view them as an unknown hazard and may perceive them at a much higher level of risk than those for which they are familiar. To address this, the Project will publish the following monograph:

- ▶ applying the science of risk perception, risk communication, risk management to EMF

Perception of hazard

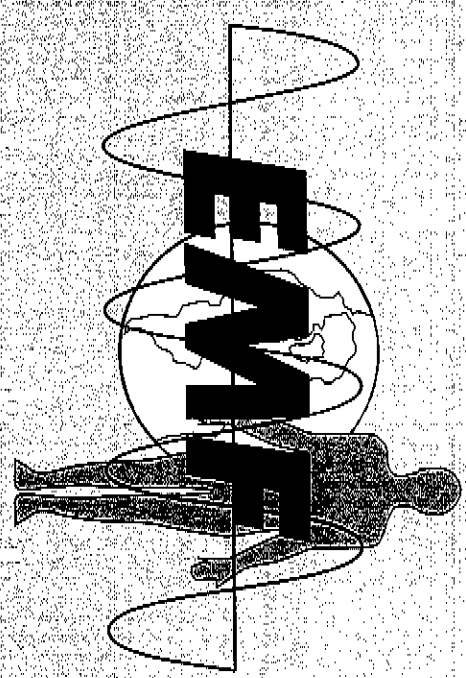
People may experience health effects when they perceive there is a health risk from devices exposing them to EMF. A review of the scientific literature on these effects will be conducted to determine if further action is necessary.

Health risk assessments

Independent expert groups, using accepted assessment criteria, review the EMF bioeffects literature. These reviews are timed to allow needed research to be completed so results can be included into health risk assessments prior to publication.

INFORMATION

- ▶ Brochures and fact sheets: will provide general information on topics related to health effects from exposure to EMF.
- ▶ Home Page:
<http://www.who.ch/emf/>
- ▶ Further Information:
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Investigating
health effects of
electromagnetic
fields

World Health
Organization

WHY IS WHO INVOLVED

Some research suggests that exposure to electromagnetic fields (EMF) may produce health effects such as cancer, changes in behaviour, memory loss, Parkinson and Alzheimer's diseases. While insufficient research has been conducted to substantiate these effects, sufficient concerns and perceptions of risks have been raised that there is an urgent need for an accelerated programme to provide scientific consensus and clarification of these issues. To address this important health concern, the International EMF Project was established by WHO in 1996. EMFs are defined as electromagnetic fields with frequencies from 0 to 300 GHz.

SUMMARY

The International EMF Project:

- reviews the scientific literature on biological effects of EMF (0-300 GHz) exposure
- identifies gaps in knowledge requiring research that will improve health risk assessments
- encourages a focused agenda of high quality EMF research
- formally assesses health risk of EMF exposure after the required research is completed
- encourages internationally acceptable standards

- provides information on risk perception, risk communication, risk management
- advises national programmes and non-governmental institutions
- drafts brochures and fact sheets on various EMF topics

HEALTH HAZARD

WHO defines health as the state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Humans respond to many stimuli as part of the normal process of living. A biological effect can lead to a health hazard (unfavourable effect on physical, mental and social well-being) if the change is outside the range of the body's compensation mechanisms.

ORGANIZATION AND COLLABORATION

The Project is managed by the International Advisory Committee (IAC), consisting of representatives of international organizations, national governments, and independent scientific institutions. The scientific work is conducted by the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) and WHO collaborating institutions. All activities are coordinated and facilitated by the WHO Secretariat.

International Organizations

International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP)
International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC)
International Labour Office (ILO)
International Telecommunication Union (ITU)
International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC)
European Commission (EC)
United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

WHO Collaborating Institutions

Independent scientific agency collaborators: National Radiological Protection Board (UK), Bundesamt für Strahlenschutz (Germany), Karolinska Institute (Sweden), Food and Drug Administration (USA), National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (USA), National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (USA), National Institute for Environment Studies (Japan).

National Governments

Over 40 countries have supported or are interested in the activities of the Project.