

CODE OF PRACTICE FOR CONSIDERATION OF REQUESTS TO SITE TELECOMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT ON GOVERNMENT OCCUPIED PREMISES - EXPLANATORY NOTE

Introduction

1. The Code was issued in January 2004. It was designed as a guidance note for managers of Government premises (“estate managers”) with the intention of developing a consistent approach across Government. It was not designed or intended to provide advice to line management or to staff concerned about possible health effects.
2. The purpose of this explanatory note is to provide line management and staff with information on the sources of advice that do exist.

Health

3. The Government takes public health concerns very seriously. In response to an increasing level of concern surrounding mobile phones and mobile masts, the Government asked an independent expert group headed by Sir William Stewart to investigate. Their report was issued in 2000 and became known as the Stewart Report. It concluded that:

“the balance of evidence does not suggest that there are adverse health effects from exposures to radio frequency (RF) fields below guideline levels”.

4. The findings of the Report were reflected in a revised version of the Planning Policy Guidance Note No 8 (PPG8) issued to local planning authorities to provide guidance on all telecommunications developments. The Stewart Report has since formed the basis for Government policy on mobile telecommunications and health, in particular that all mobile masts must comply with the International Committee for Non-ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) emission guidance levels. It also recommended that a continuing programme of research be carried out, a recommendation that the Government also accepted and supported.
5. The Stewart Report based its conclusions and recommendations on the best independent scientific evidence available. It was not alone in its conclusions. Over the last few years a number of other groups have also assessed the possible health effects of exposure to radio frequency (RF) radiation, as from mobile phone masts. These include reports from a Royal Society of Canada Expert Panel (1999), the Health Council of the Netherlands (2000), an Expert Group set up by the French Government (2001), the British Medical Association (2001), the Swedish Radiation Protection Authority (2003) and the Health Council of the Netherlands (2004). In all cases the conclusion has been that the epidemiological evidence currently available does not suggest that RF exposure causes cancer.

6. A further UK report was commissioned to look at the research undertaken since the Stewart Report. This was carried out by the Advisory Group on Non-Ionising Radiation (AGNIR) and was issued in 2004. It concluded that:

“The weight of evidence now available does not suggest that there are adverse health effects from exposures to RF fields below guideline levels, but the published research on RF exposures and health has limitations, and mobile phones have only been in widespread use for a relatively short time. The possibility therefore remains open that there could be health effects from exposure to RF fields below guideline levels; hence continued research is needed”.

7. They also concluded: *“Exposure levels from living near to mobile base stations are extremely low, and the overall evidence indicates they are unlikely to pose a risk to health”*

8. Most recently the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) issued a report on 11 January 2005 entitled “Mobile Phones and Health 2004”. The report is an update to the Stewart Report. This report stated:

“ [Since the Stewart Report] the widespread development in the use of mobile phones world-wide has not been accompanied by associated, clearly established increases in adverse health effects. Within the UK, there is a lack of hard information showing that the mobile phone systems in use are damaging to health. It is important to emphasise this crucial point.”

9. However the report goes on to note that mobile phone technology and its use is still a fairly recent phenomenon and therefore:

“The [NRPB] Board believes that the main conclusions reached in the Stewart Report in 2000 still apply today and that a precautionary approach to the use of mobile phone technologies should continue to be adopted.”

10. A third key recommendation of Stewart was for the establishment of an independent audit of sensitive sites (such as hospitals and schools). All measurements taken at sites as part of the audit have to date revealed levels of emissions many times below the maximum exposure levels recommended by ICNIRP.

11. Sources of information on:

- The Stewart Report www.iegmp.org.uk
- Health advice on mobile phones and masts – Department of Health www.dh.gov.uk
- General advice on non-ionising radiation, including mobile telecommunications, the AGNIR report and the NRPB “Mobile Phones and Health 2004” report – The National Radiological Protection Board www.nrpb.org.uk

- The ongoing research programme – Mobile Telecommunications and Health Research Programme (MTHR) www.mthr.org.uk
- The audit of sensitive sites – OFCOM www.ofcom.org.uk

Individual staff concerns

12. Despite the, current scientific consensus that exposure from mobile masts is extremely unlikely to represent any risk to the general public, estate and line managers should be aware that some individuals continue to have strong concerns about possible health risks.

13. Managers need to be aware that there may be indirect health consequences of exposing concerned individuals to phone masts, resulting from anxiety and/or perceived pressures.

14. It is not for DTI to advise individual Government Departments on local line management issues. However, Departments might consider what procedures they may wish to adopt. In the case of individuals concerned about possible health issues, line management might consider what action might help reduce the individual's anxiety. One possible model is provided by the precautionary approach many Departments take to concerns over pregnancy and the use of VDUs.

Issues for line management consideration

15. Any proposed mast is subject to the planning regulations and management might find it helpful to refer to the advice issued to local planning authorities (PPG8).

16. Additionally, the “10 Commitments” (which forms an Annex to the Code of Best Practice on Mobile Phone Network Development) commit the industry to greater consultation and transparency.

17. Early involvement of staff, including through their trade union representatives in discussions relating to a proposal to site a mast on a building can help to diffuse objections. Some Departments may already have local agreements in place on consultation or notification of the local TUS. Where these do not exist, local management are strongly encouraged to ensure the local TUS is informed that plans are being considered and invited to comment.

18. There is also no statutory requirement for exposure levels to be audited as it is deemed sufficient for all sites to be ICNIRP compliant (although requests can be made for Ofcom to audit sensitive sites). It might be possible for management to request – in considering an approach from a mobile operator - that exposure levels are measured inside or adjacent to the building to help reassure staff these are within ICNIRP guidelines, although this will only be possible once the installation is in place.

19. Consideration could also be given to including measurements at any workplace nursery or holiday play scheme to reflect the Stewart group view that children may be more vulnerable.

Information on the Code of Best Practice and PPG8 can be found at www.odpm.gov.uk

Information on the 10 Commitments can be found at www.mobilemastinfo.com

Contact Points

20. This note was agreed and issued by the DTI and by the CCSU.

21. For more information on the “Code of Practice for the consideration of requests for the siting of telecommunications equipment on Government occupied premises” contact:

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22. For more information on the role of the Council of Civil Service Unions contact:

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