

ANNEXURE 7: LETTER FROM THE NATIONAL DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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To whom it may concern

HEALTH EFFECTS OF CELLULAR BASE STATIONS AND HANDSETS

The Directorate: Radiation Control is the section within the National Department of Health that is responsible, from the viewpoint of human health, for regulating electronic products producing non-ionising electromagnetic fields (EMF), i.e. where the frequency of such EMF is less than 300 GHz. In carrying out this responsibility, the Directorate has been utilising the World Health Organization's (WHO) International EMF Project (www.who.int/emf) as its primary source of information and guidance with respect to the health effects of EMF. The International EMF Project was established by the WHO in 1996 to (i) assess the scientific evidence for possible adverse health effects of non-ionising electromagnetic fields on an on-going basis, (ii) initiate and coordinate new research in this regard, and (iii) compile health risk assessments for different parts of the electromagnetic spectrum. The Department of Health has been a member of the International Advisory Committee of the International EMF Project since 1998.

In June 2005 the International EMF Project hosted a workshop that was specifically aimed at considering the possible health consequences of the emissions from cellular base stations and wireless networks. The findings of this workshop were summarised in a 2-page Fact Sheet (www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs193/en/index.html). The following extract from this Fact Sheet provides a clear-cut summary of the findings to date, i.e. ***“Considering the very low exposure levels and research results collected to date, there is no convincing scientific evidence that the weak RF signals from base stations and wireless networks cause adverse health effects.”***

The following quote is taken from another WHO Fact Sheet (Electromagnetic fields and public health: mobile phones) that was published in June 2011: ***“To date, no adverse health effects have been established as being caused by mobile phone use.”***

The WHO recommends utilising internationally recognised exposure guidelines such as those that were

published in 1998 by the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) and that were reconfirmed in 2009 for the frequency range 100 kHz – 300 GHz (i.e. including all the frequencies employed by the cellular industry). The Department of Health likewise recommends the use of these ICNIRP guidelines to protect people against the known adverse health effects of EMF.

Numerous measurement surveys, which have been conducted around the world (and in South Africa), have shown that the actual levels of public exposure as a result of base station emissions invariably are only a fraction of the ICNIRP guidelines, even in instances where members of the public have been really concerned about their exposure to these emissions.

At present there is no confirmed scientific evidence that points to any health hazard associated with the very low levels of exposure that the general public would typically experience in the vicinity of a cellular base station. The Department is therefore satisfied that the health of the general public is not being compromised by their exposure to the microwave emissions of cellular base stations. This also means that local and other authorities, in considering the environmental impact of any particular base station, do not need to and should not attempt, from a public health point of view, to set any restrictions with respect to parameters such as distance to the mast, duration of exposure, height of the mast, etc.

The Department of Health is obviously not able to make any pronouncements about the specific levels of EMF that a member of the public would experience at any particular base station site when it is in operation. However, generally-speaking unless a person would climb to the top of a mast (or other structure supporting an antenna) and position him/herself right in front of the active antenna not more than a few meters away, such a person would have no real possibility of being exposed to anywhere near the aforementioned ICNIRP guideline limits. Since these base stations are, as a rule, cordoned off with barbed wire fencing and locked gates/doors to protect the sensitive and expensive technology, such actions would in all probability not constitute responsible behaviour. Even then the risk of falling off the structure in question would be an immeasurably greater threat to the health of the person involved. Based on the results of numerous global and local surveys, the experience has been that the exposure to base station EMF at ground level is typically in the range of between 0.001 – 1.0 % of the afore-mentioned ICNIRP guideline limits. Against this background of available data, there would be no scientific grounds to support any allegation that adverse health effects might be suffered by a responsible member of the public due to the EMF emitted by a base station.

Although the Department of Health currently neither prescribes nor enforces any compulsory exposure limits for electromagnetic fields, the Department does advise all concerned (whether they be a government department, the industry or the public) that voluntary compliance with the afore-mentioned ICNIRP exposure guidelines is the recommended and science-based way to deal with any situation involving human exposure to the non-ionising electromagnetic fields emitted by cellular base stations and handsets.

Yours sincerely,



LL du Toit

DEPUTY DIRECTOR: RADIATION CONTROL