

## EMFs and Health Effects—The Word Is Out

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After completion of a 3-year study on the health effects of electric and magnetic fields (EMFs), the 16-member panel from the National Research Council (NRC) released its findings in a report titled *Possible Health Effects of Exposure to Residential Electric and Magnetic Fields*. A major finding of the report indicates that there is no conclusive evidence to support the claim that ordinary EMF exposure causes cancer, neurobehavioral problems, or reproductive and developmental disorders. This conclusion is based on more than 500 EMF exposure reports.

The panel agreed that biological effects do occur at field intensities thousands of times greater than those found in homes. In addition, the panel members reported that there is still a statistically significant association between high levels of EMF exposure and childhood leukemia. However, they were not convinced that the indicator (wire-coding)

they used to estimate household EMFs was an accurate measure of exposure. The panel also stated that the source of the link deserves more research.

Three members of the NRC panel issued a separate statement saying that the debate over the health effects of EMFs is not yet settled and that the report should not be interpreted as implying that the case is closed on EMF effects. Other EMF researchers agree with the three-member opinion and maintain that EMFs pose enough of a risk to justify regulatory action.

Although the NRC report presents significant EMF findings, it is not the final word on EMFs and health effects. In fact, both the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy, in conjunction with the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, are still studying the issue.

Sources: Kaiser, Jocelyn. "Panel Finds EMFs Pose No Threat." *Science* 274 (November 8, 1996): 910.

Marwick, Charles. "EMF Exposure Study Rules Out 'Causing' Cancer, Finds 'Association' with Leukemia Puzzling but Real." *JAMA* 276, no. 21 (December 4, 1996): 1705-06.

National Research Council. *Possible Health Effects of Exposure to Residential Electric and Magnetic Fields*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1996.