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## **COST281 Closes Down**

**October 19...** COST281 will soon disband. This European committee, which has been looking into the possible health effects of wireless radiation primarily by hosting a series of small workshops during the last five years, has been run by FGF, the German mobile phone industry. COST281 will hold its last meeting in Brussels on November 17. A few days later, November 20-21, also in Brussels, the European Commission is hosting its **3rd mobile communications seminar** on managing EMF health risks. (See also **September 22.**)

## **Cell Phones Affect Sperm: News Not Fit To Print**

**October 26...** The last time we checked earlier today, there were 124 different articles listed on Google News pegged to a **report** that cell phones can damage sperm quality. The more hours a day men spent on their phones, the greater the harm to the count, motility, viability and morphology of their sperm, according to a paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine, being held this week in New Orleans. Every major paper in England ran a detailed story, as did news media in Australia, India and New Zealand. (We didn't check foreign language outlets, though we did see links to some in China and Turkey.)

The favorite sound bite was from Ashok Agarwal, the lead author who is at the **Cleveland Clinic**. "It's just like using a toothbrush, but it could be having a devastating effect on fertility," he said, according to the **BBC** and many other sources.

The research was carried out by a team from one of America's top hospitals and was presented in a major American city and was about a device that is now used by more than 225 million Americans. Yet, other than a couple wire services (the AP not among them) and a few local radio and TV stations, this story was a non-event. None of the major U.S. dailies bothered to carry even a blurb about it.

"What's going on?" we asked a colleague. "Cell phone health risks are seen as an urban legend," he replied.

Maybe so, but it's worth noting that this is not the first time that a link between cell phone radiation and fertility problems has been alleged. Last year, a noted Australian researcher, John Aitken, **reported** that RF radiation (900 MHz) could have a significant genotoxic effect on the DNA of the sperm of mice. Also last year, a Hungarian team from the University of Szeged, based on a survey of 371 men, **found** that cell phones had a negative impact on sperm motility. And previously, a research group at Turkey's Dicle University **showed** that microwaves can have a serious deleterious effect on sperm.

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Editors and reporters in the U.S. have more important cell phone stories to write about. The front page of the business section of this morning's *New York Times* featured an **item** on a cell phone that costs \$1,275. Now, that's news.

### **Physicist Park: Sperm Effect Is Not Possible**

**October 27...** The American press may be ignoring the cell phone-sperm story, but not so physicist Robert Park. That slayer of voodoo science wants it dead and buried. [Disclosure: We have had vehement disagreements with Park over the years, especially when back in 2001, he called *Microwave News* a "fear merchant" based on little more than his own self-deceptions.] In the latest edition of his weekly e-mail, *What's New*, Park tries to apply the coup de grâce to what's left of the story: "There is not a chance that the reported sperm counts among heavy cell phone users... has anything to do with cell phone radiation," he declares. Park

leaves no room for any uncertainty—it's simply an impossible finding. Once again, we are struck by the ease with which Park dismisses data that do not fit his mental constructs. For Park, theory, at least his theory, always trumps experience. We were taught that scientists had an open mind and would be moved by data. Clearly, that's not always the case.

### **U.K.'s Ric Saunders Joins ICNIRP**

**October 29...** Richard Saunders of the U.K. **Health Protection Agency** has been elected to **ICNIRP**. **Saunders** leads the non-ionizing radiation group at the HPA (formerly the NRPB). His predecessor at the NRPB/HPA, Alasdair McKinlay, served on the commission from 1992 to 2004 and was the chairman for four years beginning in 2000. In 2004, Saunders spent a year working with **Mike Repacholi**, the chairman emeritus of ICNIRP, at the **WHO EMF project** in Geneva.

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