

CORA-Description of the Health Council of the Netherlands' EMF Annual Update 2008

1. About

Source
Electromagnetic Fields: Annual Update 2008
Link
http://www.gezondheidsraad.nl/sites/default/files/200902.pdf
Supporting information
Information about the organisation of the Health Council of the Netherlands (HCN) and its working procedures is available on http://www.gezondheidsraad.nl/en/about-us

2. Content and Mandate

Objectives
Update on current issues deemed to be of importance: methods of assessment of scientific data by the committee; review of evidence for RF EMF and brain activity; review of evidence for RF EMF and symptoms.
EMF spectrum covered
0 Hz – 300 GHz
Status of report and authorship
The Health Council is established by Health Act; the Expert Committees are designated by President of the HCN.
Funding
Government
Accountability
None: independent scientific advisory body
Summary
Health Council reports provide objective and independent evaluations of the scientific literature.

3. Authorship

Selection of Members
Selection is by invitation by the Health Council President. Selection criteria are not provided.
Composition (institutional)
8 experts, 3 advisors (currently: 9 members, 3 advisors, 2 observers)
Composition (expertise)
Radiobiology, epidemiology, physics, medicine, neurobiology, engineering, toxicology (currently also: neuropsychiatry, cellbiology / immunology).
Impartiality
Potential members complete a Declaration of Interests (DoI), which is considered by the President of the HCN. DoIs of approved members are available upon request and will be made available at the HCN website. The procedure is briefly described in the report. DoIs need to be updated. Experts are member on their own account, not on behalf of any organisation.
Disclosure
Full disclosure of names and affiliations.
Summary
Members are as impartial as possible and transparent about any interests. Selection of members is not transparent. All necessary expertise is present.

4. Assessment Process

Literature search
A literature search strategy is not provided (but it is in later reports). Is the inclusion of the relevant literature guaranteed? Biases?
Quality assurance
Quality assessment of papers is narrative only. No formal procedures.
Weighing of evidence
A weight-of-evidence is used. The general procedure is described, but for specific topics no details are given.
Consultation activities
Internal peer review by the HCNs Standing Committee on Radiation and Health (now merged with the Standing Committee on Health and the Environment). It is not mentioned in the report, but for specific subjects there is sometimes consultation of external experts; there is also the possibility of hearing stakeholder groups.
Consensus finding
There is consensus finding, but no voting. There is a possibility of including a minority opinion (but this has never been done).
Summary
Some parts of the process of risk assessment can be improved, especially by making them more transparent.

5. Communication

Differentiation between biological and health effects
Yes
Unbiased descriptions
The report provide mostly a balanced discussion of pros and cons, but there is a tendency of paying more attention to critically evaluating positive studies then negative ones. Are the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence indicated?
Evidence-based conclusions
Yes
Plain language summary
Yes, primarily meant for policymakers.
Unbiased summary
Yes
Summary
The evaluation could be improved by also critically evaluating negative studies and by better or more explicitly considering uncertainties. The summary is balanced and understandable for non-scientists.