

With A Face To The Public

Cellular Antennas: Toward Greater Transparency

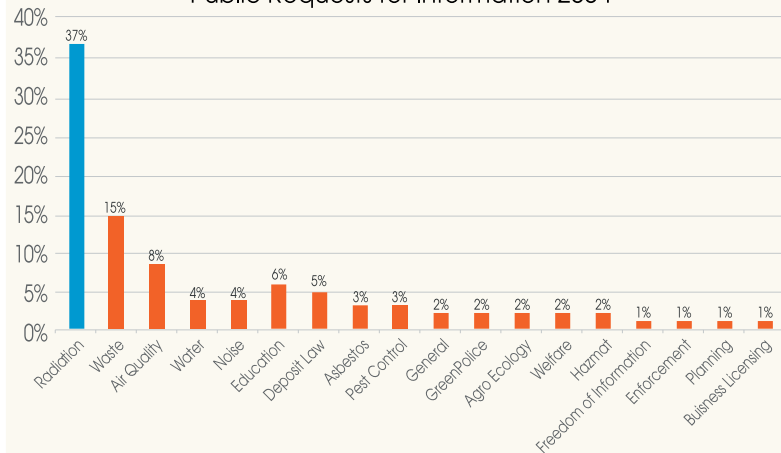
Israelis are major users of cell phones, but are up in arms about potential radiation from the base stations which support them

It is estimated that the number of cell phones in use in Israel equals the number of people living in the country. Since cell phones cannot work without an antenna, mobile phone operators must establish a network of base stations to cover specific geographic areas.

Moreover, since base stations are limited in the number of calls they can handle at one time, additional base stations must be built to meet growing demand for mobile phones. At present, some 6,700 cellular base stations (antenna clusters), erected by Israel's four cellular phone operators, support these phones.

To protect human health and the environment, the Ministry of the Environment has established two thresholds for exposure to non-ionizing radiation: a health threshold based on the recommendations of the International Commission for Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) which advises the World Health Organization, and an environmental threshold, whose value is 10% of the health threshold.

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The environmental threshold is based on the precautionary principle which calls for reaching the lowest possible radiation levels using available technology at reasonable cost. In effect, the environmental threshold is meant to balance two interests: the interest of using radiation sources for public benefit and the interest of not harming (either in terms of health or finance) residents or people in the vicinity of radiation sources.

While just about everyone in Israel has a cell phone, people are increasingly concerned about the growing number of antennas erected in their neighborhoods. Therefore, in keeping with its policy of transparency and access to information, the Ministry of the Environment provides information to the general public and to professionals alike by means of its website, brochures and information sheets.

The ministry's Hebrew website provides information, by means of an interactive map, on the location and safety standards of operating base stations (<http://gis.sviva.gov.il>) throughout the country. The map, in Hebrew, allows anyone, anywhere, to access information on base stations in their area of residence including information on: the cellular operator, type of base station, exact location, date of erection permit, date of operational permit, date of last measurement, radiation intensity (in microwatts per centimeter), percent of the health standard established by the World Health Organization, and even a photograph of the type of base station.

In recent months, in order to make information on planned cell sites available to the public prior to their erection, the Ministry of the Environment has begun to provide information on those base stations scheduled for erection on the following month. The information includes details on the location of planned cell sites and the date that the operational permit was granted.



Photo: Alex Kaplan

Radiation Exposure Thresholds in Israel

The health threshold for exposure to non-ionizing radiation defines the exposure level assuring that health damage will not be caused. This threshold is based on known adverse impacts, especially to the most sensitive populations such as children, the ailing or the elderly. The health standard established by the Ministry of the Environment is based on ICNIRP recommendations. The health threshold relates to acute (short term) exposure.

The environmental threshold for exposure to non-ionizing radiation, set by the Ministry of the Environment, takes account of the health threshold, the possibility of additional risks, the expectations of Israeli society for protection from these risks, and the ability of Israeli society to finance measures for risk reduction. The environmental threshold relates to chronic, continuous and prolonged exposure.

In areas where exposure is not continuous and prolonged, such as roofs, yards, sidewalks, parks and other such areas, the Environment Ministry does not approve the erection of facilities which may temporarily expose people to non-ionizing radiation levels which exceed 30% of the health threshold.

Transparency of information on radiation from cellular antennas is a priority