

There were so many findings since 1999...

Your Cell Phone is Killing You

Remember that old wives' tale about cell phones causing brain tumors? It may not be a myth after all, according to the cellular industry's own researcher.

by Russell Mokhiber and Robert Weissman
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Remember the "Larry King Live" show in 1993 on cell phones? David Reynard was the guest. He had filed a lawsuit against NEC, a cell phone operator, and other companies, alleging that his late wife's brain tumor was caused in part by her use of a cell phone.

The Reynard's lawsuit was dismissed in 1995, but Reynard's appearance on the show created nationwide concern. At the time, there were 15 million Americans using cell phones.

The day after the "Larry King Live" show, the Cellular Telecommunications Industry Association (CTIA) went on the defensive. Industry executives said that there were thousands of studies that proved that wireless phones were safe. In fact, there were no such studies about cell phone safety.

But CTIA understood the basic reality of the situation, and so it decided to spend \$27 million over the next six years on health studies.

They hired George Carlo, figuring he would be a perfect fit. Carlo is a public health scientist, who had a good track record as an industry researcher. Most of his clients over the years have been industry clients, and few have been disappointed with his work.

In 1994, Carlo began conducting studies to determine whether cell phones pose a health risk to consumers. Four times a year, Carlo would trudge over from his Dupont Circle office in Washington, D.C. to the offices of CTIA to debrief the CEOs of the major telephone and electronics firms that make up the \$40 billion a year mobile phone industry. And things went well, until 1995.

In 1995, Carlo found that digital phones were interfering with cardiac pacemakers.

"We then conducted about \$2.5 million worth of research to quantify that problem, and as a result, I had somewhat of a falling out with the industry," Carlo told us this week. "They didn't like that finding." The industry cut off

Carlo's funding.

But through a process of negotiation, Carlo got back in. The industry would again fund his studies, but only if he agreed not to research the questions of defibrillators and digital phones, and of cell phones and automobile safety, and he could no longer work on a very extensive program to standardize the methodology for testing whether or not cell phones met industry-defined standards.

Carlo said that it took him two months to decide that he needed to continue the work, even under CTIA's conditions, and so he did.

What he found may prove to be the cell phone industry's worst nightmare.

He found that the risk of acoustic neuroma, a benign tumor of the auditory nerve that is well in range of the radiation coming from a phone's antennae, was 50 percent higher in people who reported using cell phones for six years or more. Moreover, that relationship between the amount of cell phone use and this tumor appeared to follow a dose-response curve.

He found that the risk of rare neuro-epithelial tumors on the outside of the brain was more than doubled, a statistically significant increase, in cell phone users as compared to people who did not use cell phones.

He found that there appeared to be some correlation between brain tumors occurring on the right side of the head and use of the phone on the right side of the head.

And, most troubling, he found that laboratory studies looking at the ability of radiation from a phone's antenna to cause functional genetic damage were definitely positive, and were following a dose-response curve.

Carlo said that he has repeatedly recommended that the industry take a proactive, public health approach on the issue, and inform consumers of his findings. He says that he uses a cell phone, but only with a headset.

"Alarming, indications are that some segments of the industry have ignored the scientific findings suggesting potential health effects, have repeatedly and falsely claimed that wireless phones are safe for all consumers, including children, and have created an illusion of responsible follow up by calling for and supporting more research," Carlo wrote in a letter to top industry CEOs this month. "The most important measures of consumer protection are missing: complete and honest factual information to allow informed judgment by consumers about assumption of risk, the direct tracking and monitoring of what happens to consumers who use

wireless phones, and the monitoring of changes in the technology that could impact health."

Carlo is also troubled by a recent agreement between Elizabeth Jacobson, the person in charge of cell phone regulation at the Food and Drug Administration, and Thomas Wheeler, executive director of the CTIA. Under the agreement, CTIA will fund the FDA to do additional safety studies.

Carlo says that in 1994, Jacobson refused such a cooperative research agreement, because she didn't think she could both collaborate with the industry and regulate it. (Jacobson, through a spokesperson, denies taking this position.)

"This arrangement is wrong, plain and simple," Carlo told us. "The FDA's behavior is appalling to me. The FDA seems to be more than willing to jump in bed with the industry. It is a blatantly arrogant attempt to join in a relationship that is a conflict of interest on its face. The reason it has not been criticized is that people don't know about it. Consumers are being left out to dry."

The FDA's Russell Owen says that the FDA has not regulated cell phones because "we don't have sufficient evidence to determine that there might be adverse health effects from cell phones."

Sorry Mr. Owen, but in this instance, we agree with the industry's guy. (That's a scary thought.)

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