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[Bad Science at the Council of Europe](#)

I'm tied up with other stuff this morning, so this is going to be a bit of drive-by by my usual standards...

The Sunday Telegraph has a front page report which claims that a Council of Europe committee are planning to recommend [a ban on mobile phones and Wi-Fi networks in schools](#):

A Council of Europe committee examined evidence that the technologies have “potentially harmful” effects on humans, and concluded that immediate action was required to protect children.

In a report, the committee said it was crucial to avoid repeating the mistakes made when public health officials were slow to recognise the dangers of asbestos, tobacco smoking and lead in petrol.

The actual committee report, which comes from the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, can be [read in full here](#) and appears, to say the least, to be a spectacularly credulous document which reached its conclusions, in part, by accepting ‘expert’ assertions of extremely dubious scientific merit, for example:

60. Here, too, the rapporteur stresses that some people may be more sensitive than others to electromagnetic radiation or waves. The research performed, for instance, by Professor Dominique Belpomme, President of the Association for Research and Treatments Against Cancer (ARTAC), on more than 200 people describing themselves as “electrosensitive” succeeded, with corroborative results of clinical and biological analyses, in proving that there

was such a syndrome of intolerance to electromagnetic fields across the whole spectrum of frequencies. According to these results, not only proximity to the sources of electromagnetic emissions was influential, but also the time of exposure and often concomitant exposure to chemicals or to (heavy) metals present in human tissues. In this context, Sweden has granted sufferers from electromagnetic hypersensitivity the status of persons with reduced capacity so that they receive suitable protection.

As far as I can tell, Belpomme isn't just the President of ARTAC, [he is ARTAC](#) – he may have a few like-minded researchers working with him as co-authors on the scientific papers he's managed to get into print but, in essence, ARTAC is Belpomme's personal vanity NGO and exists to promote his research and his beliefs about the alleged environmental causes of cancer – Belpomme is on record as claiming that 70% of cancers have environmental causes. a view that is not supported by the overwhelming majority of researchers in the field.

What of Belpomme's research which allegedly proves the existence of electrosensitivity as 'a syndrome of intolerance to electromagnetic fields across the whole spectrum of frequencies'?

As far as I can tell, there's nothing whatsoever in print in any credible scientific journal, nor [if the information here is accurate](#), does it appear that his work will be subjected to peer review:

Recently, Prof. Belpomme, president of ARTAC, has taken an interest in this condition. He conducted a series of clinical examinations of electrosensitive people in order to produce a clinical description of the symptoms and the different stages in the evolution of this affliction. He also investigated the possible causal mechanisms involved and looked for diagnostic criteria (characteristic substances or processes present in the body which can indicate damage by or a sensitivity to EMF).

On the basis of this research, Prof. Belpomme concludes that electrosensitivity is real and can sometimes be very disabling. He coined the term "Syndrome of Intolerance to Electromagnetic Fields" (SIEMF) to provide a more clinical name for the condition.

The first results of this research were presented at a colloquium on EMF that took place in Paris on the 12th of January 2009. The final results will be published in a report, which will be available on the ARTAC-website.

Indeed, from [this description of his research](#) – on a blog calling itself 'EMF Journal' – his research methodology could best be described as utterly credulous in its efforts to establish 'diagnostic criteria' for a condition the existence of which has not been satisfactorily established. Belpomme has, apparently, even got into the business of [issuing 'medical certificates'](#) for his likely non-existent EMF Intolerance Syndrome.

EHS taken seriously elsewhere in the EU

From a correspondent in the EU:

"I've now got a medical certificate from Professor Belpomme certifying that I suffer from EMF Intolerance Syndrome (SICEM). As a result my problems are finally being taken seriously at work."

[Since Professor Belpomme is apparently inundated with EHS patients and probably unable to see any additional ones at present, this illustrates the need for a NHS centre in the UK which can diagnose and treat EHS. – Editor]

It is reported that numerous institutions in France are now taking steps to adapt the working environment so that it can be tolerated by people suffering from electro-sensitivity.

He's also prone to making some rather [exaggerated claims](#) about conditions other than cancer:

Why is an oncologist looking at the problems of electrosensitivity and electromagnetic fields?

Because there is a proven link between electromagnetic fields cancer and leukemia. It was after the first pioneering work we did with our Swedish colleagues that we realized that there is also an important link with neurodegenerative diseases, including Alzheimer's disease. The risks of Alzheimer's, which can also occur in young subject from the age of 45 years old is much greater than the risk of cancer.

There is, of course, no proven link between electromagnetic fields and cancer, let alone Alzheimer's.

What there is are a few obvious warning signs which any sceptic worth their sodium chloride would recognise as causes for significant concern.

In addition to Belpomme, ARTAC also has [an honorary president](#) – Nobel Laureate turned woo-peddler, Luc Montagnier.

Then there's Belpomme's personal [involvement in anti-flouridation activism](#), [in conjunction with](#) the US-based Flouride Action Network.

And to cap it all on a slightly lighter note, here's Belpomme [attending an international Ayurveda symposium as a guest speaker](#) – amusingly, the symposium's pre-programme describes Belpomme as a 'cancerologist', a term that's sure to raise a chuckle or two amongst fans of Dara O'Briain for its similarity to 'toothologist'.

Even without digging into the detail of Belpomme's research, there seems to be a number of very good reasons to view his work with extreme scepticism and ask for independent investigation, evaluation and replication of findings before giving them any weight whatsoever – and yet this EU committee appears to have uncritically accepted his 'expertise' are a using it, in part, to justify policy measures that are, at best, speculative and lacking in solid evidentiary foundations and, at worst, may well be based on nothing more than pseudoscience and the overzealous personal beliefs and prejudices of a few supposed 'experts' whose claims are, to say the least, highly questionable.



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Thoughtful analysis, but I do feel I should point out that the report was published by the Council of Europe – a body entirely separate from the European Union. In addition, the CoE has no legislative powers in the area of public health.

As far as the EU is concerned, the European Commission (the only EU institution empowered to introduce legislative proposals) recently answered a question by an MEP (<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getAllAnswers.do?reference=E-2011-002142&language=EN>), saying that the current stance of its Scientific Committee is that its most recent assessment “did not identify any scientific rationale that could lead to a change in the current recommended exposure limits.”

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Wow, this is an old school topic. Really I appreciate the precautions but everyone is up to the point they can't leave the house without their phones. How would this need reconcile with that precautionary measures.

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By: Unity

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