
The request for advice

On 16 March 2004, the President of the Health Council received the following request.

On behalf of the Minister of Economic Affairs, the State Secretary for Housing, Spatial Planning and Environmental Management, the State Secretary for Social Affairs and Employment and myself, I ask that you give your attention to the following matters.

On 30 September 2003, the report was published on TNO's study into the relationship between, on the one hand, exposure to electromagnetic fields generated by GSM and UMTS antennas and, on the other hand, cognitive functions and well-being. The outcome of the study was as follows:

- TNO found a statistically significant association between the presence of radiofrequency fields resembling those produced by a UMTS base station and the perceived well-being of the subjects. No such link had previously been observed. Subjects perceived their well-being to deteriorate in the presence of such fields.
- Certain statistically relevant associations were found between the presence of fields generated by UMTS and GSM base stations and the performance of various cognitive functions. In many cases, cognitive performance actually improved. Similar findings have been reported by other authors.

The study findings are being taken seriously by the relevant government departments concerned, and are considered by us to warrant follow-up research into the relationship between EM fields and well-being and cognitive functions. In connection with these matters, we wish to draw upon the expertise of your Council.

Against this background, we wish you to provide us with a brief report addressing the following questions:

1. What is the Health Council's assessment of the quality of the COFAM study and what does the Council see as the best approach to replication of the study?
2. Is it desirable that additional research is carried out and, if so, what particular points should that research address, bearing in mind the nature of research activities in progress elsewhere?
3. Is 'perceived well-being' a sufficiently objective concept for the formulation of scientific conclusions?
4. Does the diminution of 'perceived well-being' amount to a sufficiently serious effect on health to justify mitigating measures?

I look forward to receiving your recommendations.

Yours sincerely,

Minister of Health, Welfare and Sport
(signed) H Hoogervorst