

Background

Since 1996, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has required that all wireless telephones, including cellular and Personal Communications Services (PCS) telephones sold in the United States, meet minimum guidelines regarding safe human exposure to radio frequency (RF) energy emitted from these telephones. In the U.S., the FCC and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) share regulatory responsibilities for health concerns related to wireless telephones. Because the FCC is not a health and safety agency, it defers to other organizations and agencies, such as the FDA, to evaluate the results of biological and health studies that are necessary for determining safe levels for human exposure to RF emissions.

The limits for wireless telephone exposure adopted by the FCC are the exposure levels recommended by two non-profit, expert organizations, the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE), and the National Council on Radiation Protection and Measurements (NCRP). The FCC also consulted with the FDA and other federal agencies with interests and responsibilities in this area, and obtained their support for the FCC's guidelines as being protective of public health.

Guidelines

The FCC's guidelines specify exposure limits for hand-held wireless telephones and similar devices in terms of the Specific Absorption Rate (SAR). The SAR is a measure of the rate that RF energy is absorbed by the body. For exposure from wireless telephones, the allowable FCC SAR limit is 1.6 watts per kilogram (W/kg), as averaged over one gram of tissue.

There is no scientific evidence that proves that wireless telephone usage can lead to cancer or other problems such as headaches, dizziness, or memory loss. Many domestic and international organizations, however, are sponsoring research and investigating claims of possible health effects related to the use of wireless telephones. The federal government monitors the results of this ongoing research, and the FDA is participating in an industry-funded research project to further investigate possible biological effects of wireless telephone usage.

Helpful Consumer Websites

The FCC and the FDA have developed a joint Web site to provide the latest information on health concerns relating to wireless telephone usage, current research, and related issues. Visit the FCC's RF Safety Web site at www.fcc.gov/oet/rfsafety to access this information. You can also call the FCC's Consumer Center at 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice or 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has established an International Electromagnetic Field (EMF) Project to provide information in this area, establish research needs, and promote harmonization of exposure standards for RF energy. More information is available at www.who.int/peh-emf/en.

(More)



Additional Requirements

The FCC will withhold or withdraw its approval of wireless telephones that exceed the FCC's guidelines. If a wireless telephone's RF emissions are deemed hazardous to users, the FDA has authority to require the manufacturer of the wireless telephone to notify users of the health hazard and to repair, replace, or recall the telephones.

The FCC does not require manufacturers to publicize the maximum SAR values for their telephones. Many manufacturers however, voluntarily provide this information for many models of wireless telephones. The FCC Web site, www.fcc.gov, has links to the sources of this information. Keep in mind, however, that as long as a wireless telephone complies with the FCC's guidelines, it is safe for consumer use.

Some studies have shown that wireless telephones might interfere with implanted cardiac pacemakers if used in close proximity (within 8 inches) of a pacemaker. Pacemaker users may want to avoid placing or using a wireless telephone near the pacemaker. The FCC/FDA Web site provides more information on this topic.

For More Information

For further information about this issue or any other telecommunications-related issues, visit the FCC's Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau Web site at www.fcc.gov/cgb, or contact the FCC's Consumer Center by e-mailing fccinfo@fcc.gov; calling 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice or 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY; faxing 1-866-418-0232; or writing to:

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiry and Complaints Division
455 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554.

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To receive information on this and other FCC consumer topics through the Commission's electronic subscriber service, click on <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/contacts/>.

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