

Electrosensitivity and the Church

Why you should not put mobile phone masts on churches

What is Electrosensitivity?

Electrosensitivity (or to give it its full name electromagnetic hypersensitivity) is a condition in which weak electromagnetic fields (especially from microwaves) can cause a whole range of unpleasant symptoms, including poor sleep, headaches, skin rashes, dizziness, nausea and many others in some people during or after exposure (See <http://www.es-uk.info/info/recognising.asp>). Between three and eight percent of the population is estimated to be affected in this way but this figure could be greater since many people have these symptoms but are unaware of their link to their electromagnetic exposure. This number is likely to increase since even healthy people can become electromagnetically hypersensitive after prolonged or repeated exposure.

Implications for the Church

The installation of mobile phone or WiFi antennas on church spires is likely to make the church a no-go area for these people. This has obvious implications for the size of present and future congregations and the financial support that they can give. While it is very tempting to regard the installation of these masts as a free source of money, there are some things that you should know before going ahead.

Technical considerations

Apart from disfiguring often historic buildings by visible antennas, even if they are concealed, they will still have detrimental effects on health. You may not have been told by the mobile phone company proposing the installation that, although the radiation from the antennas is nominally beamed horizontally, there are also substantial “side lobes”, which are directed more or less vertically downwards onto the church and its immediate surroundings. This is a characteristic of this type of antenna and cannot easily be avoided. These side lobes will almost certainly expose the congregation, the clergy and everyone using the building to potentially harmful radiation.

Why is the radiation is harmful?

You will almost certainly be told by the Government, the Health Protection Agency and the Mobile Phone Industry that the radiation is safe because it is too weak to have a heating effect (which is the only criterion they have for its safety). However, this is based on a false premise. There are thousands of peer reviewed scientific publications (to which they do not refer) that say that this is not true. There are biological effects, some of which (like the destruction of DNA) are harmful at radiation levels that are hundreds or even thousands of times lower (see www.bioinitiative.org, which catalogues many of these papers). This is because the damage is done by electric currents induced in living tissues by the radiation. These interfere with metabolism and destabilise the membranes of living cells, which are themselves held together by electrical forces. This happens at levels far below those that generate significant heat. In fact, **weak electromagnetic fields can be, and often are, more**

disruptive than strong ones. This is counterintuitive and even the mobile phone industry find it hard to believe. However, you can find a scientific explanation for why this is, how it causes the symptoms of electrosensitivity and can also give rise to several other ailments, such as cancer and loss of fertility at <http://mcs-america.org/june2010pg910111213141516.pdf>

Press articles

You may also have seen an article on the Front Page of the “Sunday Telegraph” (May 15th 2011) showing how European leaders now recognise that this sort of radiation is likely to be dangerous, **especially to children**, and that children should not be exposed to it. Other papers have carried similar stories. You can see the on-line version of the “Telegraph” article at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/mobile-phones/8514380/Ban-mobile-phones-and-wireless-networks-in-schools-say-European-leaders.html> . At the time of writing, there were already over 500 reader’s comments; many from people who have already been harmed by the radiation. **Where you have children using Churches or Church Halls, they could be particularly at risk from the proposed antennas. It is also possible that you could be held responsible.**

Insurance

In this context, it would be advisable for your lawyers to examine carefully the small print of any proposed contracts with the mobile phone operators to see if the Church would have to compensate anyone who is harmed by radiation from a mast sited on its premises. Such compensation could be substantial. It may be worthwhile contacting Ecclesiastical Insurance in particular about this. It is my understanding that the mobile phone companies cannot themselves get cover from regular insurance companies because the risk is incalculable and potentially very large. It seems possible that they may want to pass this risk on to you and Ecclesiastical Insurance. It is also possible that there may be claims for damages for loss of value to properties, which often occurs when a mobile phone mast is sited close by. This needs to be considered too. All this could cost the Church and Ecclesiastical Insurance far more than the rentals it is likely to get from the mobile phone companies.

Do not act quickly

The mobile phone operators currently seem to be making a concerted effort to have antennas fitted to as many churches as possible throughout the country before the bulk of the potential dangers become obviously real. This could be a matter for the whole Church of England to consider. In the meantime, my advice would be not to go ahead with the installation of any antennas on churches until all of this has been thoroughly examined.

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