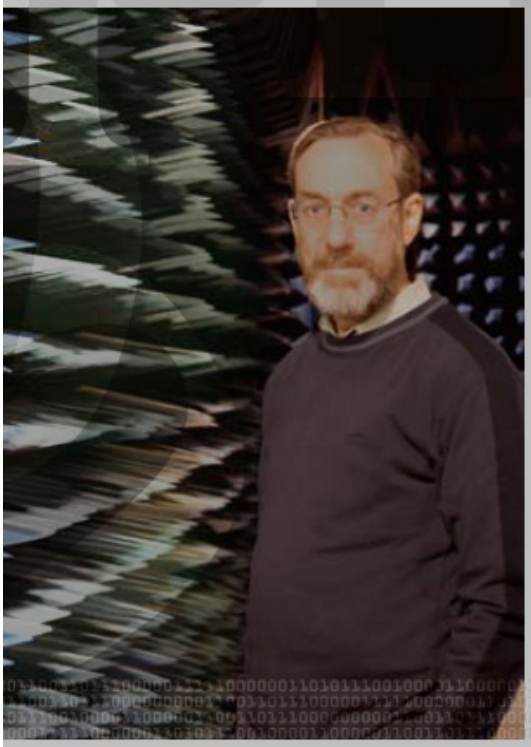
DISCOVERING THE TRUTH : THE HEALTH EFFECTS OF

MOBILE PHONES



Despite repeated stories in the media linking mobile phones to adverse health effects, researchers at the Australian Centre for Radio-Frequency Bioeffects Research (ACRBR) are yet to be convinced the relationship is conclusive.

Professor Andrew Wood, a research director at the centre, is 'agnostic' when it comes to determining whether mobile phone emissions have a harmful effect on the human brain and continues to happily use his mobile phone "without much thought about what it may be doing to me!"

The ACRBR was set up as a National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Centre of Excellence and is a collaboration of scientists from Swinburne, RMIT University, Monash University, the Adelaide Institute, Telstra and overseas affiliates. It opened in January 2004 with a grant of $2.5 million over five years, and aims to form the hub of radio frequency research in Australia.

The centre's research program has been carefully developed to reflect the most relevant and urgent research questions yet to be resolved in this complex and sensitive area of study. These include biological studies, in particular the neurobiology and epidemiology of harmful outcomes, including cancer.

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Professor Wood says Swinburne was a forerunner in the area of mobile phone research, recalling the work of a former director of the university's Brain Sciences Institute, Professor Richard Silberstein, whose interest in brain alterations caused by RF dates back to 1980.

"It was Professor Silberstein's early interest that triggered my sabbatical to the United States. We've come a long way since 1990 when we began our research with a modest grant of $4000 and the purchase of a few materials to begin our testing.

"The issue of mobile phones and health risks didn't emerge until the mid-1990s with public concern and anecdotal evidence that radio frequency radiation transmitted and received through the mobile phone antenna close to the user's head could induce or promote cancer."

Professor Wood says over the last 10 years there have been various studies around the world into the topic but, when you compare the results, the consistency of the findings isn't convincing and there do not appear to be any biophysical mechanisms to explain them.

"ACRBR research and other international studies have shown that exposure to mobile phones could possibly affect brain function," Professor Wood says. "Nonetheless, they seem to be fairly small effects, and there is no established link between mobile phones and negative health consequences.

"The only established health hazard comes from the use of mobile phones while driving. However, there is enough evidence to justify further research and taking a precautionary approach to the use of mobile phones until we can be more confident that they are completely safe."

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