

Swedish professor removed from scientific panel before voting on cell phone cancer connection

Conflicts of interest at the World Health Organization

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) is tasked by the World Health Organization to monitor research on health effects from low levels of electromagnetic radiation, such as from cell phones, Wi-Fi, smart meters and other wireless devices. The IARC panel's recommendations are usually adopted as official WHO policy.

Professor Anders Ahlbom of Karolinska Institute was chairman of the IARC panel, until he was asked to leave following allegations of conflicts of interest. Anders Ahlbom is part owner and board member of a lobbying firm, which lobbies European Parliament politicians on behalf of the telecommunications industry.

The other owner of the lobbying firm is Anders Ahlbom's brother, Gunnar Ahlbom. In a 1999 interview with the Swedish daily *Aftonbladet*, Gunnar Ahlbom is quoted as representing the telecom giant Telia, which he was still working for in 2011.

According to the Swedish newsletter *Ljusglimten*, professor Ahlbom has on many occasions publicly supported telecom industry points of view. He has actively talked against accepting electrical hypersensitivity (EHS) as a real illness, instead suggesting it is a psychological problem.

Ahlbom's downfall was caused by the Swedish investigative journalist Mona Nilsson, who documented Anders Ahlbom's conflicts of interest.

Shortly after Ahlbom left IARC, the panel voted that low (non-thermal) levels of microwave radiation are to be considered a Class 2B possible carcinogen, which is now the official position of the World Health Organization. For something to be classified as Class 2B, there must be substantial evidence to support that it can cause cancer, but not enough to prove it. Proving that something causes cancer is extremely difficult. The IARC decision was made despite heavy industry lobbying.

Ahlbom was also asked to leave an advisory board of the Swedish radiation protection agency, SSM.

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Dr. Ahlbom was a member of the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection, ICNIRP, from 1998 to 2008, where he participated in setting radiation recommendations for cell phone use. These were adopted by many countries. He presently serves ICNIRP in an advisory role, which he has not vacated.

Conflicts of interest are common in the question of health effects from cell phones and other sources.

Dr. Samuel Milham mentions specific examples of it in his book *Dirty Electricity* (pages 34 and 59), as does Dr. Devra Davis throughout her book *Disconnect*.

Dr. Lennart Hardell mentions other cases in his March 2007 article in the *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*.

In an article investigating how industry funding affects the outcome of health studies in general, a research group examined 1140 studies and found that industry-sponsored research had a significant pro-industry bias (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, January 22/29, 2003).

A review of experimental studies of cell phone health effects found that only 33% of industry-sponsored studies found any effects. Meanwhile, fully 82% of non-industry funded studies found effects (*Source of Funding and Results of Health Effects of Mobile Phone Use*, Environmental Health Perspectives, January 2007).

Sources in English

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Svenska lobbyister satser på EU-valet, Emily von Sydow, Aftonbladet, May 21, 1999, (www.aftonbladet.se).

Samlat angrepp-Varför? Eiwyn Kronholm, Ljusglimten 4/2010.

Ljusglimten is a publication of FEB, the Swedish support group for people with electrohypersensitivity (EHS). www.feb.se.

Svenska Dagbladet and Aftonbladet are Swedish daily newspapers.

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