



Airwave

Having repeatedly called for effective communications in the police service the Police Federation continues to assess the benefits and risks presented by Airwave. We understand the huge potential and operational benefits Airwave can provide, however no one can categorically state whether the system is safe or unsafe.

Scientific opinion remains divided on the long-term health effects on Airwave users and residents close to the sighting of masts.

Jan Berry, Chairman of the Police Federation of England and Wales:

"If at any time Airwave is shown to be detrimental to the health of users, the Federation will instantly call for the system to be withdrawn from service. We have in the past, and will continue in the future, to monitor all issues arising from the use of Airwave. "

The Federation has required the Home Office to produce a generic risk assessment on the hazards associated with the use of Airwave and will develop our website (www.polfed.org) to include advice and up to date information on Airwave.

Scientific knowledge and understanding changes all the time. The Federation will continue to monitor the implementation and effect of Airwave. We will seek to identify independent experts to advise us and continue to encourage and monitor all research into Airwave and keep officers informed".

Background

Airwave, the police digital radio system which allows for communication in remote locations was rolled out across England and Wales at the end of 2005. The network which supports Airwave is now fully functional and more research is being conducted to further the Home Office report that there are no long or short term health effects.

Opinion remains divided on the long-term health effects of Airwave and the sighting of masts. The Police Federation of England and Wales recognise the value of Airwave in terms of greatly improved communications, and therefore greater officer safety. However we remain concerned and have expressed reservations about having a system imposed before the full results of long and short term health effects are known.

In 2003, the Home Office commissioned a £5 million health monitoring study to look into Scientists claims that Airwave could be harmful to a users health. A number of reports have been conducted into the health effects of Airwave though most research has proved inconclusive or is still to be completed:

There are currently two strands of research being conducted and both are supported by the Police Federation:

The first by Imperial College, London, is monitoring more than 100,000 police officers to ascertain whether there are short and, or long-term effects on health. The research is due for completion in 2018.

The research has also studied 150 officers to determine whether Airwave signals have any effect on the wellbeing of users. The research has involved the measuring of officer brain function, whilst wearing Airwave headsets, and so far there appears to be no detrimental health effects.

The second research project is being conducted by Kings College, London. This research is aimed more specifically at short term effects.

We will communicate any conclusions or findings as and when we have them.

Notes:

- Airwave enables officers to work more effectively and safely by offering fast and direct contact with colleagues through secure channels and prevents outside access which can potentially compromise the security of officers.
- The Stewart Report in 2000 recommended that amplitude modulation of around 16 Hertz per second should be avoided. The TETRA (terrestrial trunked radio) system, on which Airwave is based, operates at 17.6 Hertz and is very close to the frequency to be avoided.
- Following the Stewart Report the Home Office commissioned the Advisory Group on Non – Ionising Radiation (AGNIR) to prepare a report on the possible health effects of TETRA. It was recognised that calcium plays an important role in many biological processes, especially nerve cells and concerns were raised that RF fields modulated at around 16Hz may cause calcium ions to leak from tissues including the brain. This could potentially affect anything from memory to personality. This evidence only became known after the agreement had been reached to start ‘phasing in’ Airwave.

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