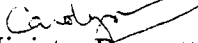




Office of the Commissioner
of Health Services

November 23, 2004

The Honourable Carolyn Bennett
Minister of State (Public Health)
Tunney's Pasture
Ottawa, ON K1A 0K9


Dear Minister Bennett:

Re: Guidelines for Electricity Corridors

I understand that you have been made aware of a situation in York Region regarding a publicly controversial proposal by HydroOne to upgrade transmission lines to northern York Region thereby affecting several municipalities in the Region. As Commissioner of Health Services and Medical Officer of Health for The Regional Municipality of York, I have been asked to comment on the health issues related to exposure to extremely low frequency (ELF) electromagnetic fields (EMFs) by various municipalities and interested groups.

Clearly, the regulation of public exposure to any form of radiation is the jurisdictional responsibility of the federal government, however Health Canada has not established any human exposure limits with respect to extremely low frequency EMFs nor any guidelines for siting electricity transmission lines. The World Health Organization (WHO), as recently as October 2004, has encouraged nations to establish guidelines and standards for electrical wiring in homes and for the siting of electricity corridors since they have stated that "while the evidence is currently not strong enough to justify a firm conclusion that EMF fields cause leukaemia in children, the possibility remains that intense and prolonged exposures to magnetic fields can increase the risk of leukaemia in children." Given this position, it would seem that siting requirements for electrical transmission lines which consider residential and school locations, or at the very least, requiring inclusion of a human health risk assessment in the siting process are necessary steps.

I have submitted a letter to Leona Dombrowsky, Ontario Minister of the Environment, suggesting that specific requirements be made under the Environmental Assessment process for mandatory disclosure of the projected EMF exposure at the edge of transmission corridors for future corridor construction and/or expansion projects. This would provide an opportunity for all levels of government, stakeholders, and members of the public to voice their opinions and allow for meaningful planning decisions in the absence of clear federal guidelines, through the public consultation/information process.

Of course this is not a new issue in the health sector. Since 1995, I have consistently recommended prudent avoidance of exposure to EMFs where economically and reasonably feasible. However, since the WHO has recently recommended guidelines and standards for the siting of electricity corridors due to the continued concern that EMFs are possible carcinogens, and that jurisdictional responsibility for regulations regarding public exposure to radiation lies with the federal government, I am requesting you, in your capacity as Minister of State (Public Health), to urge Health Canada to establish guidelines for siting high voltage electrical transmission corridors in order to ensure public safety.

I would be pleased to discuss this issue with you in more detail. I can be reached at (905) 830-4444 ext. 4011.

Sincerely,



Dr. K. Helena Jaczek MD,CCFP,MHSc,MBA,CHE
Commissioner of Health Services
and Medical Officer of Health