

**HEALTH**

# NBTC asks WHO for clarity on telecom base health risks

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The telecom regulator is urging the World Health Organization (WHO) to clarify whether radio-frequency electromagnetic fields emitted by telecom base stations have any effect on public health.

The move aims to address concerns and complaints made against base stations and lodged against mobile operators, the regulator and local governments for the past decade.

Takorn Tantasith, secretary-general of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC), submitted an official letter to WHO last month urging it to address the concern and confusion about whether radio-frequency electromagnetic fields affect public health

because of all the digital infrastructure development in the country.

Mr Takorn is participating in the annual meeting of Global Coordination of Research and Health Policy on RF Electromagnetic Fields in Paris from Nov 12-14.

This is the first time the NBTC's secretary-general has given a speech on radio-frequency electromagnetic fields and public health in Thailand.

Mobile cellular services are growing fast in Thailand to meet the needs of the commercial, industrial and public sectors, accelerating the pace of infrastructure development.

The NBTC has auctioned off three frequency bands — 2100-megahertz, 1800MHz and 900MHz — in 2012, 2015 and 2018, respectively, for 3G and 4G services.

Since then mobile operators have rushed to expand site installations to achieve nationwide coverage.

With the rapid growth of new site installations, the general public has expressed concerns about possible health risks caused by exposure to radio-frequency electromagnetic fields emitted by base station antennas.

In some areas, locals protest the installation of base stations located in their communities despite needing to use 3G or 4G devices.

Some cases were brought before the Administrative Court to seek revocation of a radio communication installation licence at particular sites.

"Complaints were made against base stations and lodged through mobile operators, the regulator as well as local governments. Some of those complaints were made through media and were headline news on television channels. Internet and social media are often used as a mean to propel complaints, sometimes sharing one-sided and misleading information," he said.

Mr Takorn said the NBTC has received numerous complaints concerning possible health effects due to radio frequency from base station antennas.

Symptoms caused by radio-frequency exposure, as specified in the complaints, include fatigue, tiredness, headache, tinnitus, insomnia, stressed, vomiting and anxiety due to a fear of cancer in some cases, mobile phone base stations were blamed as a possible cause of cancer.



Telecom towers in a residential area of Bangkok's Sai Mai district. Locals have protested towers in their neighbourhoods over health fears. PATTANAPONG HIRUNARD