

**FIELDS OF STUDY**

The telecom regulator plans to host an ad hoc meeting in Bangkok next March on the health effects of electromagnetic fields. **B4**



**Telecom towers near a housing project in Bangkok's Sai Mai district. Concern has grown about the potential health ramifications of such towers.**

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**TECHNOLOGY**

# NBTC to talk base stations at March meet

WHO letter tries to dispel health fears

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The telecom regulator plans to host an ad hoc meeting in Bangkok next March as it strives to broaden general knowledge of whether radio frequency electromagnetic fields emitted by telecom base stations cause adverse health effects.

The move follows a recent announcement of the World Health Organization

(WHO), which said it has no proof that telecom base stations are harmful to health.

The WHO has yet to furnish evidence about its findings.

The meeting would be held alongside representatives from the WHO and the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection.

The National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) has sought ways to address complaints made against base stations lodged through mobile operators, the regulator and local governments over the past decade.

NBTC secretary-general Takorn Tantasith said that after the meeting the NBTC will call on all mobile operators and

provincial governors to discuss the issue in order to publicise the information in areas where people cling to misinformation.

According to part of the letter from the WHO, the group is developing a health risk assessment from human exposure to radio frequency fields (RF), which includes frequencies from mobile phone base stations and other wireless networks and technologies.

As per the ongoing review of literature on the topic, scientific evidence to date does not show a risk of adverse health effects from mobile phone base stations.

The WHO established the International EMF Project in 1996 to assess scientific evidence regarding possible effects on humans by electromagnetic fields (EMFs) in the frequency range 0-300GHz, including mobile phone network frequency bands.

The International Advisory Committee (IAC) oversees the project and includes members of international organisations, WHO collaborating centres and more than 50 national authorities. Thailand has been an active member of the IAC for many years.

The WHO coordinates international responses to concerns about possible health effects from exposure to EMFs and disseminates a wide range of informational material on the subject to national EMF

protection programmes and the public.

The organisation also participates in scientific meetings around the world, including the NBTC Symposium on radiofrequency electromagnetic fields and human health in Bangkok in December.

In a 2006 report, the WHO stated: "Considering the very low exposure levels and research results collected to date, there is no convincing scientific evidence that the weak RF signals from base stations and wireless networks cause adverse health effects."

More recently, a review of the scientific evidence commissioned in 2010 resulted in publication in the WHO bulletin, which noted: "Our review does not indicate an association between any health outcome and radiofrequency electromagnetic field exposure from [mobile phone base stations] at levels typically encountered in people's everyday environment."

Mr Takorn said the official letter from

the WHO is critical for the regulator and industry to provide updated information to the public.

The secretary-general attended an annual meeting of Global Coordination of Research and Health Policy on RF Electromagnetic Fields this week in Paris. Representatives of the WHO joined the meeting as major participants.

The NBTC has been concerned about the spread of misinformation, as well as complaints made against base stations in Thailand. These concerns will affect infrastructure development that would enhance broadband connectivity, especially 5G, which requires a greater number of cell towers to operate effectively.

The NBTC has auctioned off three frequency bands, namely 2100MHz, 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.

As a result of the rapid growth of new installations, concern has only grown about potential health ramifications.

In some areas, local citizens protested against the installation of base stations in their community, despite their own need to use 3G or 4G services.

Some Administrative Courts oversaw cases seeking revocation of radiocommunication installation licences for particular sites.

Complaints were made against base stations and lodged through mobile operators, the regulator and local governments.

Some of those complaints were made through media and appeared on TV news programmes and newspaper headlines. Social media also served as a tool to propagate the complaints, at times sharing one-sided and misleading information.

In some cases, mobile phone base stations were claimed to have caused cancer.