1. New standards, legislations and ordinances

In October 2005, the State Secretary of Public Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment has sent a letter to all local authorities with recommendations concerning the power line issue. The recommendation is to avoid new situations near overhead high-voltage power lines where children can be exposed to an annually averaged magnetic field strength of more than 0.4 μT.

No changes in existing situations are proposed. These will invariably incur very high costs.

A website has been developed by the National Institute for Health and the Environment (RIVM) where “indicative zones” for all power lines in the country are given, i.e., areas near power lines where under worst case conditions the annual average may exceed 0.4 μT. When a new situation is under consideration, i.e. a new power line near existing places where children spend significant parts of their time (such as dwellings, schools, day care centres) or new building activities near an existing power line, more detailed calculations have to be made to determine the “specific zone”.

The proposals are recommendations and not compulsory.

Recently a court ruling was published on a house near a relocated power line: the local authorities were to pay € 27000 in compensation for loss of property value. This was basically because of a change in the zoning plan, but although the court admitted that health effects were not proven, they still were an element of consideration: “potential buyers might find this a reason for lowering their bid”.

2. Research activities

At the repeated request of Parliament, the Netherlands government has decided to start a research program on health effects of exposure to electromagnetic fields. The Health Council was asked to give recommendations for subjects that might be investigated within this program. A report on this was published on May 30, 2006, and can be found at the Health Councils website (www.gr.nl). It is currently only available in Dutch with an Executive Summary in English, but a full translation in English will be available by the end of July, 2006.

The research program is planned to start in September 2006. It encompasses the frequency range of 0 – 300 GHz and it will focus on research in the Netherlands, but international collaboration will be stimulated.
3. Public concern and ways to deal with them

As a result of the activities of the activist group “Stop UMTS” an increasing number of people are worried about possible health effects of exposure to UMTS signals. This is driven by the results of a 2003 TNO study that indicated a decreased well-being after exposure to UMTS. A great number of local authorities have decided to postpone decisions on siting of UMTS antennas until the results of a Swiss replication study have been published, that has been co-financed by the Netherlands. A paper on this study was published on June 6, 2006. It employed the same exposure level as the TNO study (1 V/m) and a higher level (10 V/m). No indications for any effects on well-being with either exposure level were observed in this study.

In order to better respond to concerns and questions from the public and local authorities, steps have been taken to come to a national information centre on effects of electromagnetic fields. Several parties, such as national authorities, municipal and regional health services and research institutes, are collaborating in this. Finalization is expected in the second half of 2006.

4. Other topics of related interest

The Health Council of the Netherlands published in November 2005 its “Electromagnetic Fields: Annual Update 2005”. Some of the subjects dealt with are studies on cancer near GSM base stations or radio and television transmitters, epidemiological studies on mobile telephone use and brain tumours, the REFLEX program and “electrical hypersensitivity”. The report can be found at www.gr.nl.