

Susan Foster, MSW

15957 Avenida Calma

Rancho Santa Fe, California 92091

(858) 756-3532

PRESS RELEASE

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIREFIGHTERS (IAFF) VOTES TO STUDY HEALTH EFFECTS OF CELL TOWERS ON FIRE STATIONS

Call for Moratorium on New Cell Towers on Fire Stations Until Health Effects Can Be Studied

Boston, MA – August 24, 2004 – Firefighters returned to their home stations throughout the United States and Canada following last week's IAFF convention after passing a resolution to study the health effects of cell towers placed on the fire stations where they work and live. Added to the resolution was an amendment calling for the IAFF to support a moratorium on the placement of new cell towers on fire stations until the completion of the study.

In many parts of the U.S. and Canada, the wireless industry has sought to place cell towers on fire stations because of their strategic locations. Fire stations tend to be located in densely populated areas, many of them near main highways, making them attractive locations for cell towers to maximize coverage. The wireless industry is not alone in the benefits of placing cell towers on these stations. Municipalities receive revenue from the wireless companies in exchange for locating the antennas on fire station property.

Lt. Ron Cronin of the Brookline, MA Fire Department and Asst. Chief. Joe Foster of the Vancouver Fire Department and Vice President of Vancouver, B.C. Local #18 spearheaded the passage of the resolution.

“Some firefighters with cell towers currently located on their stations are experiencing symptoms that put our first responders at risk. It is important to be sure we understand what effects these towers may have on the firefighters living in these stations,” Cronin explained. “If the jakes in the fire house are suffering from headaches, can't respond quickly and their ability to make decisions is clouded by a sort of brain fog, then entire communities they are protecting will clearly be at risk. No one wants the guys responding to their family emergency to be functioning at anything less than 100 percent capacity.”

A recent pilot study of six California firefighters, first publicly revealed at the IAFF convention by medical writer and study organizer Susan Foster, MSW of Rancho Santa Fe, CA, raises concern about the safety of fire fighters working and sleeping in stations with towers.

The study, conducted by Dr. Gunnar Heuser of Agoura Hills, CA, focused on neurological symptoms of six firefighters who had been working for up to five years in stations with cell towers. Those symptoms included slowed reaction time, lack of focus, lack of impulse control, severe headaches, anesthesia-like sleep, sleep deprivation, depression, and tremors.

Gunnar Heuser, MD, PhD used functional brain scans - SPECT scans - to assess any changes in the brains of the six firefighters as compared to healthy brains of men of the same age. Computerized psychological testing known as TOVA was used to study reaction time, impulse control, and attention span.

Disturbingly, the SPECT scans revealed a pattern of abnormal change which was concentrated over a wider area than would normally be seen in brains of individuals exposed to toxic inhalation, as might be expected from fighting fires. Dr. Heuser indicated the only plausible explanation at this time would be RF radiation exposure. Additionally, the TOVA testing revealed among the six firefighters delayed reaction time, lack of impulse control, and difficulty in maintaining mental focus.

Because of increasing complaints among firefighters with cellular antennas on their stations coupled with the California study showing damage among the six firefighters tested, a group of five individuals spread across two provinces and three states worked with Southern California firefighters to draft the resolution put before the IAFF membership last week. Lt. Ron Cronin and Asst. Chief Joe Foster were joined by Dr. Magda Havas of Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario, Vermont-based Janet Newton - president of the EMR Policy Institute, and Susan Foster, MSW.

“It is imperative to understand that in spite of the build out of an extensive wireless infrastructure in the U.S. and Canada,” explained Susan Foster, “we have no safety standards for cell towers. There are only regulatory standards, not proven safety standards. The Heuser Study in California calls into question whether or not we are sacrificing the health and well being of our countries’ first responders for the convenience of a technology we’ve come to rely upon.” Considering approximately 80 percent of the firefighters attending last week’s convention voted in favor of a medical study with the spirit of a cell tower moratorium attached, it appears firefighters throughout the U.S. and Canada share that concern.

This study has far-reaching public health implications in view of the fact that the wireless industry pays local governments to place cell towers, not only on fire stations, but also on top of schools and municipal buildings.

For more information contact:

Susan Foster, MSW: 858.756.3532; susan.foster04@gmail.com
Lt. Ron Cronin: ronaldcronin@gmail.com
Asst. Chief Joe Foster: joe.foster@vancouver.ca
Magda Havas, Ph.D.: mhavas@trentu.ca
Janet Newton: JNewton@emrpolicy.org
Gunnar Heuser, M.D., Ph.D., F.A.C.P.: (*contact Susan Foster, MSW*)