

NEWSPEAK: Redefining the Precautionary Principle for the Cellphone Industry

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Newspeak was the fictional way of reinventing the English language as created in George Orwell's Si Fi classic."1984". To Quote from the Newspeak dictionary:

"The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of IngSoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible. It was intended that when Newspeak had been adopted once and for all and Oldspeak forgotten, a heretical thought -- that is, a thought diverging from the principles of IngSoc -- should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words. Its vocabulary was so constructed as to give exact and often very subtle expression to every meaning that a Party member could properly wish to express, while excluding all other meaning and also the possibility of arriving at them by indirect methods. This was done partly by the invention of new words, but chiefly by eliminating undesirable words and stripping such words as remained of unorthodox meanings, and so far as possible of all secondary meaning whatever."¹

"Newspeak", far from being a fictional medium of expression, is alive and well in the ongoing Cellphone controversy. George's classic Si Fi novel probably sits in many a corporate reference library, under a section titled: "Risk Management".

Let's have a look at how Newspeak is being applied to the well known concept **The Precautionary Principle / Approach**, as it is defined in three expert committee mobile phone reports.

- 1) The UK Independent Expert Group on Mobile Phones (IEGMP), chaired by Sir William Stewart. (2000)²
- 2) The UK Advisory Group on Non-Ionising Radiation (AGNIR) (2004)³

¹ http://www.newspeakdictionary.com/ns_frames.html

² <http://www.iegmp.org.uk/>

³ http://www.nrp.org/press/response_statements/2004/response_statement_2_04.htm
http://www.nrp.org/publications/documents_of_nrp/abstracts/absd14-2.htm

3) The reports from the the Electromagnetic Fields Committee of the Health Council of the Netherlands, titled: Mobile Telephones: An Evaluation of Health Effects (2002 and 2004) ⁴

The Precautionary Principle / Approach. The "Oldspeak" definition:
<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/reg/precaut/precaute.shtml>

"The precautionary approach/principle is widely recognized as a distinctive approach to managing threats of serious or irreversible harm where there is scientific uncertainty. It is not new—what is new is the increasing complexity of the science and the public debate about the ability of governments to respond to such situations. The application of "precaution" recognizes that the absence of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing decisions where there is a risk of serious or irreversible harm."⁵

1) The UK Independent Expert Group on Mobile Phones (IEGMP)

The IEGMP independent Expert Group on Mobile Phones, chaired by Sir William Stewart based much of its recommendations on the Oldspeak version of the precautionary approach. Here are just a few quotes from the main conclusions of the Stewart report:

"We conclude therefore that it is not possible at present to say that exposure to RF radiation, even at levels below national guidelines, is totally without potential adverse health effects, and that the gaps in knowledge are sufficient to justify a precautionary approach."⁶

"In light of the above recommendations we recommend that a precautionary approach to the use of mobile phone technologies be adopted until much more detailed and scientifically robust information on any health effects becomes available."⁷

"We note that a precautionary approach, in itself, is not without cost (paragraph 6.16) but we consider it to be an essential approach at this early stage in our understanding of mobile phone technology and its potential to impact on biological systems and on human health."⁸

⁴ <http://www.amta.org.au/default.asp?Page=300>

⁵ <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/reg/precaut/precaute.shtml>

⁶ IEGMP Report, Chapter 5, paragraphs 6.35-6.42

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ IEGMP Report, Main conclusions, page3, point 1.21

" If there are currently unrecognised adverse health effects from the use of mobile phones, children may be more vulnerable because of their developing nervous system, the greater absorption of energy in the tissues of the head (paragraph 4.37), and a longer lifetime of exposure. In line with our precautionary approach, at this time, we believe that the widespread use of mobile phones by children for non-essential calls should be discouraged. We also recommend that the mobile phone industry should refrain from promoting the use of mobile phones by children."⁹

In essence the Precautionary Approach/Principle is enacted to protect the health and wellbeing of those who may be at risk.

The NRPB starts the Newspeak spin

2) The UK Advisory Group on Non-Ionising Radiation (AGNIR)

Compiled by AGNIR this report is stated to be an update of the "scientific evidence relevant to an assessment of the effects of exposure to RF fields which has accumulated since the Stewart Report on Mobile Phones and Health was published in 2000."

Some AGNIR quotes relating to the precautionary approach:

"In aggregate the research published since the IEGMP report does not give cause for concern. The weight of evidence now available does not suggest that there are adverse health effects from exposures to RF fields below guideline levels, but the published research on RF exposures and health has limitations, and mobile phones have only been in widespread use for a relatively short time. The possibility therefore remains open that there could be health effects from exposure to RF fields below guideline levels; hence continued research is needed."¹⁰

"Little has been published specifically on childhood exposure to RF fields and no new substantial studies on this have been published since the IEGMP report."¹¹[This is all they say about children and mobile phones-no recommendations are given.]

The Punch Line:

⁹ IEGMP Report, paragraphs 6.89 and 6.90

¹⁰ http://www.nrp.org/press/release_statements/2004/response_statement_2_04.htm

¹¹ *ibid.*

"In the interim, the [NRPB] Board considers that the AGNIR review, as published, supports the broad conclusions of the Stewart Report in 2000 that a precautionary approach **to the development of mobile phone technology** remains a justifiable approach."¹²

Note the subtle shift towards Newspeak here?

Gone are the Oldspeak definitions as used in the Stewart report, such as:

". . . mobile phone technology and its **potential to impact on biological systems and on human health.**"

" If there are currently unrecognised **adverse health effects** from the use of mobile phones, **children may be more vulnerable** because of their developing nervous system"

". . . is totally without **potential adverse health effects**, and that the **gaps in knowledge** are sufficient to justify a precautionary approach."

Now the NRPB has given us the beginnings of a new definition of the "precautionary approach" as it relates to cellphones, to one focusing on "**the development of mobile phone technology**".

The Dutch take Newspeak one step further

3) The reports from the Electromagnetic Fields Committee of the Health Council of the Netherlands

The new Orwellian definition of the Precautionary Approach/Principle is further refined in the new mobile phone report by The Health Council of the Netherlands. They discussed the adoption of the Precautionary Principle which they re-define as:

"The Precautionary Principle is not, by definition, the same thing as taking measures to reduce exposure. It can also include other actions." The Committee states, "carrying out further research...together with monitoring scientific developments and publishing its findings...are adequate steps in the current context of precautionary measures."¹³

So, in other words, as long as industry funded research is progressing-that is the Precautionary Principle in action and no need to take any further action. This allows the Dutch committee to conclude "Furthermore the Committee feels that

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ <http://www.amta.org.au/default.asp?Page=300>

there are no health based reasons for limiting the use of mobile phones by children."

This is in line with their earlier 2002 report where they stated: "It is unlikely from a development point of view that major changes in brain sensitivity to electromagnetic fields still occur after the second year of life. The Committee therefore concludes that there is no reason to recommend that mobile telephone use by children should be limited as far as possible." . . .The Committee also concluded that the scientific information concerning non-thermal effects* discussed in its report provided no reason to apply the precautionary principle"¹⁴

That's Newspeak in action. Just one of the many tools used in cellphone risk management. Old George would be proud!

*Non-thermal effects: An Oldspeak term redefined in Newspeak to mean: hypothetical; unsubstantiated; non-existent, or off with the fairies.

¹⁴ Health Council of the Netherlands; Reports 2002, <http://www.gr.nl/pdf.php?ID=859>