

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT
BY DEPUTY K.C. LEWIS OF ST. SAVIOUR**

ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY, 16th JANUARY 2007

Question

Further to public concerns, would the Minister undertake to ensure that no mobile telephone masts and base units are sited less than 300 metres from any school or medical facility?

Answer

As I have explained in the past it is not the role of the planning system to determine health safeguards for the public. However when I came into office at the beginning of this year, I recognised that there was public concern over the potential health impacts of the telecommunication base stations and requested an informed opinion from Health and Social Services as to the potential health impacts of mobile phone base stations.

The report from Health Protection in April 2006 was clear that no sound or reliable scientific evidence has been produced, which indicates that exposure to the emissions from base stations is harmful in any way to health. The levels involved in Jersey are many times lower than the level of emissions recommended as safe by Lord Stewart's Independent Expert Group on Mobile Phones in 2000. Adoption of these safe levels was an integral part of the precautionary approach recommended in Lord Stewart's report.

Not only has the Planning Department complied with the Health Department's recommendations for these telecommunication applications but I have gone beyond the recommendations of the Health Department and beyond the best practice in the UK. I require that all applications provide the estimated levels of emissions and, following the commissioning of the installation, the actual levels are measured by an engineer and verified by the Health Protection Department. It should be noted however, that estimated levels of emissions are a theoretical maximum based on ideal circumstances and are worst-case levels. The actual emissions from a base station are absorbed and reflected by buildings or vegetation and can be expected to be 100 to 10,000 times less than the estimates.

In this context I have ensured that I am not approving masts that pose health risks and that once the masts are installed they will be closely monitored and operated well within international guidelines. This situation applies to schools, medical facilities or the general population.

Turning now to the specific question raised by Deputy Lewis, I am satisfied at the current time there is no need for particular limitations to be put on installations in relation to nearby uses. This is for three particular reasons. Firstly and most importantly there is the information I have outlined above. Internationally recognised and independent research with budgets of many millions of pounds has not identified a link between mobile phone base stations and harm to any sector of the population. In such a context I cannot reasonably impose any spatial limitations on the installations.

Secondly it appears to me that the 300 metres suggested is an arbitrary number that has no scientific basis and is not supported by any credited Health Organisation worldwide. There have been reports that other countries have adopted exclusion zones or set minimum distances from mobile phone base stations to residences or schools. The main countries that have been stated as having exclusion zones are France, Australia and New Zealand. The fact is that none of these countries have adopted any statutory or federal exclusion zones or any other arbitrary additional safety factors beyond the exposure limits set by the international guideline. I have had direct written confirmation from the French Agency for Environmental and Occupational Health Safety and the French Ministry for Health that France "has not adopted any specific regulations relating to exclusion zones between mobile phone base stations and schools or residences".

Thirdly, despite other countries not having exclusion zones, the practicality of Jersey adopting exclusion zones would be impossible. It would be impossible to find enough land parcels in Jersey to support a mobile network that was 300-500 metres from any home or school. Even if you could find appropriate land parcels, the reality is that the owner of the land may not consent to the installation. There have been several installations to date that have not been located in the optimum place in a certain area because the land owner has refused consent, and have had to be installed at the next best location.

Concerns of a base station within 300 meters of school have recently been raised in relation to a recently approved planning application (S/2006/2353). The site on La Grande Route de St Lawrence, St Lawrence, when measured on the ground the site is 293 metres from the north-eastern boundary of the playing field of St Lawrence Primary School. The school building is in excess of 340m from the base station.

Notwithstanding the above I have been placed in a very difficult position with regard to determining the outstanding mast applications. I wish to balance my legal obligation to determine these outstanding applications within a reasonable time and my respect for the imminent Health, Social Security and Housing Scrutiny Sub-Panel review of the issues surrounding the mobile phone base stations. Whilst I am satisfied on the basis of all the information currently available that there is no credible evidence available that links the presence of base stations with any health issues, it may be that the Sub-Panel reach a different conclusion and I am mindful of this possibility. With this in mind, since 8th January 2007 I have conditioned all the permits for telecommunication equipment to the effect that should the Minister for Health and Social Services change his policy on the safety of telecommunication installations, I can require that the installations are removed. Should the Minister for Health and Social Services not change his policy, the permissions will have permanent effect. The permit for the base station in St Lawrence referred to above has such a condition attached.

In conclusion based on the currently available information I am satisfied that it would be unreasonable for me to impose exclusion zones for the mobile phone base stations in any circumstances if those base stations conform to the internationally recognised emissions limits.