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Symptoms of ill health ascribed to electromagnetic field exposure- -a questionnaire survey.

[Röösli M](#), [Moser M](#), [Baldinini Y](#), [Meier M](#), [Braun-Fahrländer C](#).

Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine, University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland.
Roeoesli@ispm.unibe.ch

From June 2001, health questionnaires were distributed to people who complained about symptoms of ill health which they ascribed to exposure to electromagnetic fields (EMF). The objective of the survey was to gain a better knowledge of the anxieties of complainants, to obtain hints of possible problems and of actions that should be taken to solve the problems. The survey was not designed to establish a causal association between exposure to EMF and symptoms of ill health. Within one year, 429 questionnaires were returned of which 394 persons reported symptoms. The average age of the complainants was 51.0 years and 57 percent were female. The complainants were older, had a higher educational level and were more likely to be married compared to the general Swiss population. A mean of 2.7 different symptoms were reported. Sleep disorders (58%), headaches (41%), nervousness or distress (19%), fatigue (18%), and concentration difficulties (16%) were most common complaints. Complainants related their symptoms most frequently to exposure to mobile phone base stations (74%), followed by mobile phones (36%), cordless phones (29%) and power lines (27%). No distinct symptoms related to a specific field source could be identified. Eighty-five percent of the people who consulted a public authority because of their symptoms were unsatisfied with the response, whereas consultation of self-help groups or building ecologists usually fulfilled expectations. Two thirds of complainants had taken some action to reduce their symptoms. The most common measure was to avoid exposure if possible. Removing or disconnecting indoor sources was judged to be the most effective action.

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