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CLINICAL AND HYGIENIC ASPECTS OF EXPOSURE TO ELECTROMAGNETIC FIELDS

(A Review of the Soviet and Eastern European Literature)¹

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INTRODUCTION

It has long been apparent that electromagnetic fields impose a health hazard, especially at field intensities greater than approximately 15 mW/cm², which cause thermal (heating) responses in the organism. Only quite recently it is suspected, from the Soviet and East European literature, that these fields might also elicit certain functional or so-called "specific" responses, especially in the nervous system, at field intensities less than 10-15 mW/cm², which do not cause heating.

Prior to 1964, no comprehensive effort had been attempted in this country to review the world (especially the Soviet and East European) literature on the general biological effects of microwaves. Soviet literature was in most cases scattered, quite difficult to locate, and consequently had never come to the attention of the U.S. scientific community. When in 1964, one of the first reviews on this subject was attempted by the writer, then affiliated with the Library of Congress, it was speculated by some authorities on the subject that an extremely low yield of literature would result from the attempt. It was therefore quite surprising that a search of the Soviet and Eastern European literature on the biological effects of microwaves revealed a large and virtually unexploited body of information which had never come to the attention of the U.S. scientific community. The first review (1) contained 132 references to Soviet and East European work on this subject. Subsequent reviews by the author (2-4) and a number of others (5-9) revealed that some of the most active research in the world was being conducted in the Soviet Union and some of the Eastern European countries.

¹ The views expressed by the author do not necessarily represent those of the U.S. Navy.

It is the purpose of this paper to review Soviet and Eastern European studies of the effects of radio-frequency fields on the human organism. An attempt will be made to summarize the more noteworthy findings of some of the literally hundreds of published works devoted to this subject and to underscore the need for a more critical and systematic treatment of this subject. This review will concentrate nearly exclusively on human clinical studies and occupational hygiene surveys and will not consider the more theoretical or experimental aspects of the biological effects of microwaves.

BACKGROUND

As early as 1933, certain Soviet scientists had already recognized that electromagnetic fields affected the human nervous system. In 1937, Turlygin (10) published one of the first comprehensive Soviet accounts of the effects of centimeter waves on the human central nervous system. He found that CNS excitability was increased by 100% of the control level when a crude spark oscillator in the vicinity of the head of a subject was switched on. In a lengthy review article, Livshits (11) cited no fewer than 28 Soviet publications on the general subject of clinical and biological microwave effects which had been published by the end of the 1930's.

During the 1940's and early 1950's, there was an understandable lull in research on this subject due to World War II. By the middle and late 1950's, there appeared a veritable deluge of Soviet literature dealing, in the main, with the clinical and hygienic aspects of microwave exposure which has continued unabated to this day. By the early 1960's, the Eastern European countries of Czechoslovakia and Poland had also become extremely active in the area of microwave exposure effects. In a cursory

