

**Cellular towers near schools, colonies may be banned**

1 Apr, 2008, 0925 hrs IST, Joji Thomas Philip & Gireesh Chandra Prasad, TNN

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**NEW DELHI:** Rattled by recent media reports that prolonged cellphone use may lead to cancer? You may breathe easy. Even as recent studies in the UK have warned that 'mobile phone usage could kill more people than smoking', India is finally set to unveil a policy specifying

safety guidelines to limit public exposure to radio waves from base stations and mobile handsets.

The policy, to be called guidelines for complying with limits for human exposure to electromagnetic fields, is likely to ban telcos from putting up cellular towers near schools, hospitals and rooftops of large residential buildings, among other measures. It's being finalised by the department of telecom's technical arm-Telecom Engineering Centre-in consultation with the two cellular associations Cellular Operators Association of India and the Association of Unified Service Providers of India. Inputs are also being sought from the Telecom Equipment Manufacturers Association and the Indian Cellular Association.

"We are very close to finalising the policy. It will be unveiled soon," COAI director-general TV Ramachandran told ET. Another source, who was part of the consultation, added: "We have had several meetings on limiting public exposure to radiation from telecom services. The fine print of the policy is yet to be finalised."

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The guidelines assume importance in view of recent developments in Europe, where many governments are considering adopting new, stringent norms than those specified by the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP), an independent international scientific organisation that provides guidance and advice on health hazards of non-ionising radiation exposure.

ICNIRP's guidelines are endorsed by the World Health Organisation and have been adopted by most international [telecom](#) majors. India has not yet adopted ICNIRP norms.

Earlier this year, the French government had warned against the dangers associated with the use of mobile phones, especially by children, while other nations such as Germany, the UK and the European Environment Agency have asked citizens to reduce exposure to mobile handsets.

When announced, the policy will also ensure India is among the select countries that have guidelines to provide protection against alleged side-effects from [mobile](#) radiation.

Mr Ramachandran said the final policy would be more reasonable compared to the draft paper unveiled late last year. The draft guidelines said handset ads should not feature children and pregnant women. It also proposed that children under 16 years be discouraged from using [mobile phones](#). It also said setting up telecom base stations within school and hospital premises be avoided 'because children and patients are more susceptible to electromagnetic fields'.

"The tissues of children below 16 years are tender and are, therefore, likely to be more affected by the use of mobile phones," TEC's draft guidelines added.

Another contentious issue was the draft policy's suggestion that all handset manufacturers specify the specific absorption rate (SAR)-the amount of radio waves absorbed by the body when using a mobile phone-in the handset screen menu. Handset makers had opposed this, saying they already provide the phone's SAR value in the user manual accompanying the handset. Sources who attended the meeting between TEC and industry executives said a final decision on this issue was yet to be taken.

Every cellphone sold officially anywhere in the world has a unique SAR value, but unlike the US and European Union, India currently does not mandate that handset makers declare the SAR level. Both the Federal Communications



## Commission (FCC) and EU have stringent safety standards in place on cellphone radiation levels.

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