

STANDARDS OF EVIDENCE NECESSARY TO DEVELOP POLICY

Cindy Sage

Ms. Sage described the debate over enacting prudent avoidance measures, specifically, on whether there is sufficient scientific evidence on EMF to develop policy. Scientists, policymakers, public health experts, litigators, consumers, and others frequently disagree about when to change policy because each group has a different "action threshold," the level of scientific certainty necessary to take action. Understanding others' perspectives, however, may help these groups come to consensus about an appropriate range of action.

Scientists set their action threshold at causal evidence. They generally do not want to take action based on extrapolation of preliminary, inconclusive studies and do not want research to be sidetracked by those who act prematurely. Advocates, on the other hand, believe the required level of evidence falls below scientific certainty, and they have little patience for scientific caution. They want to educate women about potential risks and how to avoid them so women can make educated decisions about their own exposure.

Ms. Sage then described the standards of evidence adopted by three interest groups in the EMF debate:

- Science requires 95 to 99 percent certainty and the fulfillment of several criteria, including cellular, animal, and human studies; replication; and scientific consensus (including industry scientists).
- Law requires 51 to 53 percent certainty, or a preponderance of evidence.
- National environmental regulations require 10 to 30 percent certainty, or the potential for impact.

Although the opinions of workshop participants may reflect the diversity of these approaches, if advocates and scientists consider each other's perspectives, they should be able to propose a mutually acceptable range of action to reduce the potential harm of EMF.

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