

CALL

Wake-up

WITH RECENT RESEARCH RAISING QUESTIONS ABOUT THE DANGERS OF CELL-PHONE RADIATION, ESPECIALLY TO CHILDREN, ROBERT SULLIVAN WONDERS WHY MORE PEOPLE AREN'T LISTENING. PHOTOGRAPHED BY NICK KNIGHT.

Faced with the daunting task of replacing my cell phone the other day, I marveled at the options: Am I the only person left on the planet who just wants a phone to call ahead for dinner reservations? Won over by the salesperson, I bought the BlackBerry Tour. When I got home and paged through the directions, my eyes began to glaze over until I came to the part about exposure to radio-frequency signals. According to the instructions, I should hold the phone *away* from my ear and avoid letting it even touch my head—about an inch away, in fact. (It also says, almost comically, “reduce the amount of time spent on calls.”)

This seemed counterintuitive to me—don't you put a phone to your ear? The idea also surprised David O. Carpenter, M.D., director of the Institute for Health and Environment at the State University of New York at Albany. Carpenter first learned of the recommendation while at a hearing on cell-phone safety in the Maine state legislature this past March. A man who was testifying happened to mention that manuals suggest keeping some space between you and your phone. “I didn't know that, and I don't think anybody knows that,” Carpenter said.

That is about to change as politicians, researchers, and public-health officials are once again grappling with questions

about the effects of radio-frequency radiation, the kind emitted by wireless devices. For years the cell phone-safety debate has seemed stalemated: The Food and Drug Administration and the Federal Communications Commission have said that cell phones are safe or, more specifically, that they have not been proven to be harmful. “The weight of scientific evidence has not linked cell phones with any health problems,” reads the FDA's statement. The cell-phone industry has concurred. But mounting evidence of the possible adverse effects of cell-phone radiation in Europe and in Israel has spurred some state legislatures in the United States to take precautionary action. In California, a proposed bill would require cell-phone manufacturers to prominently display the amount of radiation a phone emits, along with the price and other features. (Currently, you have to wade through the manuals or surf the FCC's Web pages to find this information.) In Maine this past spring, a legislator went even further, introducing a bill to require cell-phone manufacturers to put a safety warning in the packaging, similar to the one on cigarette packs, stating that the radiation emitted by the phone has been linked to cancer.

In each case, the cell-phone industry has marshaled forces to resist the legislation, claiming that the warnings are unnecessary. In Maine, the bill was changed under pressure from the cell-phone

CHILD'S PLAY

Many children see cell phones as toys, but concerns about safety persist. Sittings Editor: Phyllis Posnick.