

INSTRUCTION 20

MOBILE TELEPHONES

References:

- A. Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- B. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (as amended)

Introduction

20.1 The use of mobile phones at work offers a convenient and efficient way of communication. In some circumstances they can have safety benefits in terms of security and for use in emergencies. However concern has been growing with regard to their potential health effects, and to the dangers associated with their use.

Potential Health Risks

20.2 Mobile phones can emit low levels of microwave radiation during use. Such low levels of microwave radiation can induce minute, localised heating of body tissue. The levels of radiation experienced by users are well below the dose limits recommended by the UK's National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB). There is no current evidence that health risks are posed to mobile phone users from such low level exposures to microwaves. Nevertheless the Council, as a responsible employer, consider that employees using mobile phones should take sensible steps to minimise their exposure to microwave radiation and these steps are set out below.

Other Hazards

20.3 Using a hand held phone while driving severely limits the driver's ability to physically control the vehicle in a safe manner. The law requires a driver to have proper control of their vehicle at all times. Even with hands free phone sets in vehicles, it is safer not to use them while driving as conversations can distract attention from the road.

20.4 The potential for mobile phones to interfere with sensitive electronic equipment means that their use is forbidden in aircraft, hospitals and petrol filling stations. It also has implications for persons fitted with cardiac pacemakers or other medically implanted electronic equipment. Mobile phones, unless specially designed for this purpose, can pose a fire risk if used in potentially flammable atmospheres.

Council policy on the safe use of mobile phones

20.5 The following must be followed when using mobile phones for Council business. You should also refer to any specific manufacturers' safety information supplied with your phone.

- Unless there is an operational reason for you to leave your mobile phone on, ensure your phone is switched off before driving.
- **Never** use a mobile phone whilst driving. If for any reason your mobile phone does ring whilst driving, allow the message service to take the call, or allow a passenger to answer, this includes the use of hands free equipment.
- On a long journey take regular breaks to check for messages and to make necessary calls.
- Switch off your phone when at a petrol refuelling station or when near any other potentially flammable atmosphere, e.g. paint spraying or bottled gas storage. Please note that a mobile will continue to transmit responses if left on stand-by.

- We would recommend that a mobile phone should only be used where necessary. Where possible always use an ordinary landline phone instead. Encourage callers to use answer phone and message taking services and to contact you on the mobile only when the call is urgent.
- When you have to use a mobile phone, use it for a short duration only.
- **Do not** press the phone tight against your ear. Leave a slight gap between the phone and ear to reduce the concentration of absorbed energy.
- If you have to make an unavoidably lengthy call, change the phone periodically from ear to ear in order to minimise localised concentration of absorbed energy.
- If you have a cardiac pacemaker or other medically implanted electronic equipment, seek medical advice before using a mobile phone.
- In some buildings and locations the use of a mobile phone is prohibited (e.g. chemical plant, hospital, in an aircraft). Employees should switch off a phone when visiting such sites and should also check before entering a site that there is no restriction on the use of mobile phones.