

Reference: 1559320

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3 February 2023

## Freedom of Information: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information about an ICNIRP certificate for an existing mobile phone mast installation and EMF.

We received this request on 9 January 2023 and have considered it under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (“the Act”).

### Your request

*You asked: ‘I am writing to you to enquire about the ICNIRP certificate of an existing mobile phone mast installation in my immediate neighbourhood. The installation consists of 6 4G masts and is sited on the top of the staircase of Redhill Court, Palace Road, SW2 3NP London. This is a shared site by O2 and Vodafone. As the installation is less than 15 m high, no planning approval was required. Telecoms installations of 20m height and above require prior approval by planning which includes the submission of an ICNIRP certificate which is published on the planning portal. I assumed that the requirement to self-certify ICNIRP compliance also applied to smaller masts. However, when I contacted building control, I was informed that they do not hold the information. They furthermore advised that the information is in the public domain but provided no further information.*

*The reason for my enquiry is that Three UK have been granted permission to erect a monopole 4 and 5G mast on the pavement adjacent to Redhill Court. They say they have taken the other masts into consideration but the ICNIRP certificate provided by them shows no evidence that this is the case. There are 10 flats sandwiched between the 2 masts and residents are very concerned about the EMF radiation they will be exposed to, especially those living in the top floor flats.*

*Please can you provide information on the following questions:*

- 1.) Does Ofcom hold ICNIRP certificates for telecoms sites?*
- 2.) If Ofcom does not hold the information, who does? If they are in the public domain, where can they be looked up?*
- 3.) How can residents in the flats concerned ensure that general public EMF levels are not exceeded in their bedrooms?*
- 4.) It is likely that O2 and Vodafone will want to upgrade their installation to 5G (there is space on*

*the installation for 5G antennas to be added) which will ultimately increase the ICNIRP public exclusion zone. How is the safety of the residents between the masts being safeguarded in the case of upgrades?’*

### Our response

It may be helpful for me to first provide some background on our role in relation to radio spectrum and electromagnetic fields (EMF). Ofcom is not responsible for setting EMF exposure levels and does not authorise or control the physical telecommunications masts or towers; rather, we authorise and manage the use of the radio spectrum in the UK, including the spectrum used by mobile network operators (MNOs). We issue licences and set conditions for the use of spectrum without a licence. Further information on our role in relation to EMF is available on our [website](#) (see also our [General EMF queries](#)).

In recent years, some people have raised concerns around the safety of EMF emissions, particularly from new technologies such as 5G. In 2021, following public consultation, Ofcom decided to include [a new condition in spectrum licences](#), requiring licensees to ensure that their use of equipment (operating above a certain power) complies with the internationally agreed EMF levels in [Guidelines](#) issued by the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) for the protection of the general public.

This is consistent with advice from [the UK Health Security Agency](#) (UKHSA), which is responsible for public health matters associated with radiofrequency electromagnetic fields (EMF), or radio waves. UKHSA’s main advice is that EMF levels should comply with the internationally agreed levels in the ICNIRP Guidelines. On its website, UKHSA notes that *“expert groups have examined the accumulated body of research evidence at national and international levels. Their conclusions support the view that health effects are unlikely to occur if exposures are below ICNIRP’s internationally agreed guideline levels.”* In relation to 5G, UKHSA have said that *“the overall exposure is expected to remain low relative to guidelines and, as such, there should be no consequences for public health”*.

Ofcom carries out unannounced tests of EMF levels around radio transmitters, including mobile phone masts, and can take [enforcement action](#) against spectrum licensees if they produce EMF at levels above those set out in the ICNIRP Guidelines. All [measurements](#) to date over many years have shown that EMF levels are well within the internationally agreed levels in the ICNIRP Guidelines. However, we recognise that there is a lot of public interest in this issue and we will continue to carry out EMF measurements as 5G rollout continues, and publish these on our website.

Ofcom has no involvement in the planning process for physical structures such as masts, buildings etc that may host radio equipment, or in the enforcement of planning law. This is a matter for local planning authorities. The responsibility for planning policy falls to the DLUHC – [Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities](#). In particular, Section 10 (paragraphs 114–118) of MHCLG’s [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (July 2021) outlines the planning criteria for communications infrastructure in England.

There are also [codes of practice in England and Wales](#) which explain that MNOs are committed to compliance with internationally agreed levels of exposure to electromagnetic fields. These codes also require MNOs to sign a declaration (sometimes referred to as an “ICNIRP Certificate”) to self-certify that installations at a new site or changes to installations at an existing site comply with the public exposure levels in the ICNIRP Guidelines. Further information on [Masts and planning](#) is available on our website. Our [General EMF queries](#) may also help answer some of the questions you have.

In response to your specific questions:

**1.) Does Ofcom hold ICNIRP certificates for telecoms sites?**

No, Ofcom does not hold this information. As explained above, Ofcom has no involvement in the planning process.

**2.) If Ofcom does not hold the information, who does? If they are in the public domain, where can they be looked up?**

MNOs submit ICNIRP declarations to local planning authorities. We do not hold information on whether these documents are in the public domain.

**3.) How can residents in the flats concerned ensure that general public EMF levels are not exceeded in their bedrooms?**

As explained above, Ofcom carries out unannounced tests of EMF levels around radio transmitters. All measurements to date over many years, including of masts close to residential buildings, have shown that EMF levels are well within the internationally agreed levels in the ICNIRP Guidelines. Ofcom also provides a chargeable service where individuals can request Ofcom to carry out EMF measurements near mobile base stations. Further information is available [here](#).

**4.) It is likely that O2 and Vodafone will want to upgrade their installation to 5G (there is space on the installation for 5G antennas to be added) which will ultimately increase the ICNIRP public exclusion zone. How is the safety of the residents between the masts being safeguarded in the case of upgrades?**

MNOs are required by their spectrum licences to ensure that their use of equipment complies with the internationally agreed EMF levels in the ICNIRP Guidelines. As set out in paragraph 9.1 of our [EMF Guidance](#), we expect spectrum users to reassess compliance “when they make any change or addition to a site which is likely to increase the EMF exposure levels above the levels in their most recent EMF assessment in any area where the general public may be present when transmissions are taking place.”

I hope this information is helpful. If you have any further queries, then please send them to [information.requests@ofcom.org.uk](mailto:information.requests@ofcom.org.uk) quoting the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely,

Gloria Akinyemi

If you are unhappy with the response you have received in relation to your request for information and/or consider that your request was refused without a reason valid under the law you may ask for an internal review. If you ask us for an internal review of our decision, it will be subject to an independent review within Ofcom.

The following outcomes are possible:

- the original decision is upheld; or
- the original decision is reversed or modified.

#### **Timing**

If you wish to exercise your right to an internal review **you should contact us within two months of the date of this letter**. There is no statutory deadline for responding to internal reviews and it will depend upon the complexity of the case. However, we aim to conclude all such reviews within 20 working days, and up to 40 working days in exceptional cases. We will keep you informed of the progress of any such review. If you wish to request an internal review, you should contact [information.requests@ofcom.org.uk](mailto:information.requests@ofcom.org.uk).

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Further information about this, and the internal review process can be found on the Information Commissioner's Office [here](#). Alternatively, the Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
Cheshire  
SK9 5AF