

Reference: 01549198

Temiloluwa Dawodu
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13 January 2023

Freedom of Information: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information in relation to the phone mast near your property. We received this request on 28 December 2022. We have considered it under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the “FOI Act”) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (the “EIR”).

Your request and 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 authorises and manages the use of the radio spectrum in the UK. We issue licences and set conditions for the use of spectrum without a licence. 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 the ICNIRP Guidelines 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 The International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (‘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 random, unannounced audits 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.

Below, I provide a response to your additional questions:

Please provide information on the site owner for the mast. Also who holds the license to operate.

We do not hold information on the site owner for the mast. However, the photos you have shared indicate that the site may be owned by Cellnex (a wireless telecommunications infrastructure and services company), and that all four MNOs in the UK (EE, Vodafone, Virgin Media O2 and Hutchison 3G UK) may have a presence at this site.

The licences to use radio spectrum (issued by Ofcom) are generally held by individual mobile network operators (MNOs). MNO licences authorise the use of blocks of spectrum on a national basis, and MNOs self-plan their assignments and rollout – they do not need to seek permission from Ofcom before installing a new mast. They may however need to obtain planning permission before installing a new mast. 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. Further information on [masts and planning](#) is available on our website.

Also the date of the last certificate that confirms that the emissions are within the guidelines.

We do not hold this information. As part of the planning process, MNOs have entered into [codes of practice in England and Wales](#). These codes explain that MNOs are committed to compliance with internationally agreed levels of exposure to electromagnetic fields, and require MNOs to self-certify that installations comply with the public exposure levels guidance set by ICNIRP. However, these declarations of ICNIRP compliance are submitted to local planning authorities, not to Ofcom.

How do you know its within guidelines if its not had an audit? When was it last checked? How can i find out. How do offcom monitor it? Where is the governance process? What i want to know is when was this mast last checked, results and when will it be checked again?

As explained above, Ofcom carries out random, unannounced audits 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. While Ofcom has not performed tests on every radio mast in the UK, it has performed tests on many hundreds of masts at locations across the UK and all measurements to date have shown that EMF levels are well within the internationally agreed levels in the ICNIRP Guidelines. Many of these measurements have been taken at distances of 100m or less from mobile phone masts. I have checked our records and can confirm that we have not carried out an audit at the mast near your property.

What happens if emissions are over guidelines? Does the licence holder need to get it fixed? To reduce.

As explained above, Ofcom can take enforcement action against spectrum licensees if they produce EMF at levels above those set out in the ICNIRP Guidelines. Further information on the enforcement action Ofcom may take is set out at section 15 (page 31) of our [EMF Guidance](#).

I hope this information is helpful. If you have any queries, then please contact information.requests@ofcom.org.uk. Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely,

Temiloluwa Dawodu

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.

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. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

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