

Re: Federal Wi-Fi panel criticized for undisclosed conflict

In a newsletter published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal (CMAJ) on June 18, 2013, the editor of CMAJ asserts an undisclosed conflict of interest within Expert Panel on Review of Safety Code 6: Potential Health Risks of Radiofrequency Fields from Wireless Telecommunications Devices, and that the Society is reviewing its selection of the panel chair. The Royal Society of Canada's response to these allegations, which has been submitted for publication as a letter to the editor in CMAJ, is reproduced below.

The above newsletter reports that the Royal Society of Canada is reviewing its selection of the chair of its Expert Panel on Review of Safety Code 6: Potential Health Risks of Radiofrequency Fields from Wireless Telecommunications Devices, based on alleged non-disclosure of a possible conflict of interest by the chair, and possibly by other panel members. The activities of all panel members were discussed at the initial panel meeting, in accordance with the requirements of the Society's Committee on Expert Panels. At that time, none of the activities of the panel were determined to present conflicts that would compromise the ability of the panel to complete its work in objectively evaluating the scientific data on potential health effects of radiofrequency fields.

The newsletter incorrectly reports that I said that the Society is reconsidering its selection of the panel chair, and that consulting activities by panel members were not disclosed during the conflict of interest discussion. What I said was that I would refer these issues to the oversight committee for review. I have since determined that the record of the conflict of interest discussion confirms that consulting work done by panel members for federal government agencies was in fact disclosed. Although not tabled, the Industry Canada report referred to in your editorial was included in the conflict of interest discussion. Because of the perceptions of conflict expressed in the editorial, I have asked all panel members to provide more detailed information on the activities they identified during the initial conflict of interest discussion.

To ensure that the views of interested parties on the state of the science regarding radiofrequency fields and health are considered by the panel, a public consultation session with the panel will be held during the course of the panel's deliberations. These views will be given full consideration as the panel develops its report, and determines whether or not the guidelines on exposure to radiofrequency fields in the most recent update to Safety Code 6 are consistent with current scientific evidence.

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Chair, Committee on Expert Panels
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The panel chair has also submitted a letter to the editor of CMAJ regarding incorrect statements about research funding received by Canadian academic investigators involved in international epidemiological research on the association between cellular telephone use and brain cancer risk. This letter is

reproduced on the University of Ottawa McLaughlin Centre for Population Health Risk Assessment website www.mclaughlincentre.ca.

The Royal Society of Canada regrets the misimpressions created by the CMAJ newsletter, which was written by a freelance journalist, Mr. Paul Webster, who interviewed both the Chair of the Royal Society of Canada Committee on Expert Panels and the Chair of the Expert Panel on Review of Safety Code 6. Because of the misperceptions and controversy created by this newsletter, the panel chair has voluntarily elected to step down from the panel effective July 5, 2013. In order to avoid further occurrences of this type, the Royal Society will not comment further on the work of the Expert Panel on Safety Code 6 until the panel's final report has been completed, peer-reviewed, and submitted to Health Canada, the sponsor of this report.