



UK research funders welcome the revised EU Physical Agents Directive and urge the European Parliament and Council to approve the exemption for magnetic resonance imaging.

We are a coalition of UK research funders that support and welcome the European Commission's revised Physical Agents Directive 2004/40/EC.¹ The revision includes an exemption for magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) technology from the electromagnetic field exposure limits.

We ask members of the European Parliament and Council to work together and approve the revised Directive so it can be swiftly implemented.

The coalition comprises the Medical Research Council (MRC), the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), British Heart Foundation, Cancer Research-UK (CR-UK) and the Wellcome Trust. In 2009-2010, we spent over €2.959 billion on biomedical research. We all support high-quality research in imaging and fund related research infrastructure and scanners.

Background

The EU Physical Agents Directive 2004/40/EC sets minimum requirements to protect workers from risks arising from exposure to electromagnetic fields. However, concerns were raised that the Directive could seriously restrict the use of MRI for research and clinical diagnosis. In 2007, the European Commission postponed the implementation deadline of the Directive, from April 2008 to April 2012. This provided time to gather evidence on the impact of the Directive on MRI and to revise it accordingly.

Why is the exemption needed?

The exemption for MRI is required because the revised Directive's electromagnetic field exposure limits would still restrict the use of MRI in research and medical practice. Although MRI will be exempt from the exposure limits, workers using MRI will be protected by existing safety regulations. For example, MRI safety standard IEC/EN 60601-2-33 defines criteria to minimise physiological effects and protect patients, researchers and MRI operators.

Next steps

We support the activities of the Alliance for MRI, an organisation that includes European Parliamentarians, patient groups, leading European scientists and the medical community.² The Alliance has been active in ensuring that European health and safety legislation is not detrimental to the use of MRI in biomedical research or clinical practice.

We will continue to work with other European funders, the Alliance, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and Member State parliamentarians to ensure that the Directive does not impede the use of MRI in research or the clinic. Through our support we hope that advances in imaging technology will continue to benefit human health.

¹ Directive 2004/40/EC on "the minimum health and safety requirements regarding the exposure of workers to the risks arising from physical agents (electromagnetic fields)"

² http://www.myesr.org/html/img/pool/110614_Alliance_Press_Release_Publication_of_draft_EMF_Directive_EN.pdf