

HIGH VOLTAGE POWER LINES, SUICIDE & DEPRESSION

The Myth:

Overhead high voltage power lines and associated electromagnetic fields (EMFs) have no impact on the incidence of suicide or depression.

The Facts:

- One of the earlier studies to find a correlation between the presence of transmission line EMFs and the increased occurrence of suicides was conducted in England by Reichmanis et al. (1979).
- Electrical utility workers in Quebec had increased risks of committing suicide up to 2.8 times the expected (Baris et al. 1996).
- Wijngaarden et al. (2000) examined mortality from suicide in relation to EMF exposure among close to 139,000 electrical utility workers. They found the risk of suicide mortality was up to 3.6 times the expected, depending on specific type of electrical utility work and worker age. Workers less than 50 years of age experienced the highest risk of suicide mortality.
- The occurrence of depression and headache in relation to living next to a high voltage power line in the U.S. was studied by Poole et al. (1993). Subjects who lived either on a property abutting the power line right-of-way or who could see the towers from their yard or house had a risk of depression 2.8 times the expected. The same subjects had a risk of non-migraine headaches 1.5 times the expected.
- Data from the Vietnam Experience Study were analysed by Savitz et al. (1994), who reported risks of depression among electrical workers 1.7 to 2.0 times the expected.
- The risk of severe depression was increased by 4.7 times the expected among Finnish subjects living within 100m of a high voltage power line (Verkasalo et al. 1997).
- In a study of Polish subjects, the difference in levels of depression and anxiety disorder between a group living next to two 400kV transmission lines and a control group was statistically significant (Zyss et al. 1997).



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