

EU Directive on electromagnetic fields postponed

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The European CanCer Organisation (ECCO) has welcomed the European Parliament's overwhelming vote to postpone for four years the implementation of the EU Directive on electromagnetic fields.

The EU Physical Agents (Electromagnetic Fields) Directive 2004/40/EC was due to be implemented in all member states by April this year, but it would have had the unintended effect of halting the use of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), an important tool in cancer diagnosis, treatment and research. On February 19 (2008), the European Parliament voted to postpone the Directive until 2012 in order to allow time for extensive consultation and amendment to take place.

Professor Alexander Eggermont, President of ECCO, said today (Thursday 21 February): "We are delighted that the European Parliament has voted to postpone the implementation of this EU Directive. ECCO represents some 40,000 professionals working across Europe and we were most concerned that the Directive would have effectively banned the use of MRI for cancer diagnosis and cancer research. This would have been very bad news for patients as some eight million MRI patient examinations are carried out each year in Europe.

"The Directive would have posed particular problems to those healthcare staff that care for patients such as children, the elderly, or those who have been anaesthetised, and who need help and comfort during scans. It would also have stopped the use of MRI for interventional and surgical procedures.

"ECCO will now be involved in the scientific consultations that the European Commission will be undertaking to amend the Directive, in order to ensure that major advances that have been made in cancer care are not put into jeopardy."