

When the telephone lines are dismantled, people with disabilities may be cut off

by Steen Hviid

The telecom giants are promoting a total dismantling of the telephone system and a move to people using cell phones and internet phones exclusively. The world's cell phone industry is concentrated in Sweden and Finland (home to Nokia and Ericsson) and these countries are at the forefront of these new technologies. The telecom company TeliaSonera has already started dismantling rural telephone lines in those countries, and in the United States AT&T is actively attempting to get the Federal Communications Commission to mandate a rapid phase-out of all telephone landlines.

There have been protests in Sweden, petitions and meetings with the Minister of Communication, but to no avail. Swedish law mandates telephone service as a right, but the authorities reply that the law is "technology neutral", it does not guarantee a certain type of phone.

The United States has no laws guaranteeing phone service, and the authorities generally favor the corporate interests more than they do in Sweden.

The big money wants the landlines cut, so it will happen. The question is how to cope with it.

The transition to digital television may serve as a guide in some aspects. The FCC was concerned about putting the burden of buying a new TV on people of low income, so the industry produced converter boxes that were sold for about \$50 and people of low income could apply for vouchers so they were free.

In Finland, the Ministry of Transport and Communications set 12 conditions for allowing TeliaSonera to dismantle their phone lines. They were also concerned about fairness to customers, and stipulated that TeliaSonera must ensure that "special groups" are not left out.

They also stipulated that TeliaSonera must make sure that their cell phones can be used in every room of every home, not just in as a minimum in one place in each home, as TeliaSonera suggested. The Ministry's reasoning was that people with mobility issues cannot be expected to move around, and TeliaSonera must provide, for free, an external antenna if needed. For other groups, a docking station for their cell phone may have to be provided, so they could continue to use any specially adapted phone.

2 *When the telephone lines are dismantled*

People with EHS may be able to use a special low-EMF phone i.e. “tube phones” connected to a cell phone docking station. The cell phone is placed in the docking station, and a regular phone cord continues on to the phone. This approach has already been tested using a CellSocket docking station. It does not work for very sensitive people, as high-frequency signals travel on the phone cord. This happened even when a dozen ferrite beads were installed on a fifty foot long cord.

What would be needed is a total separation, which is only achievable using a fiber-optic link, and only analog electronics. A prototype of this approach is available, but a fully designed manufactured model is needed, and at an affordable cost. The telecom giants stand to make billions on the dismantling of the telephone network, so they should be mandated by the FCC to develop and produce such a device.

Even better would be to make a fully zero-EMF telephone available, like those produced in Sweden, where the sound travels in tubes so there is no speaker or microphone in the handset. Such phones should be provided with a fiber optic cable going to a remote cell phone docking station.

People living in developed areas may have the option of using a VoIP telephone via an internet line (DSL, coaxial, etc.). These digital phones are not usable by people with EHS. Adapters are available so a regular phone can be placed on an internet line, which may help some, but there can still be a problem with having such a computerized device nearby, and high-frequency signals travelling across the wires. A fiber-optic line may help with this.

Even with these accommodations, there may be very sensitive people who will still lose the use of their telephone. People who live in apartments may be particularly affected, as they may not be able to put a cell phone docking station in an unused room all the time to get sufficient distance. Apartment dwellers may also see their ambient radiation level rise, due to the neighbor’s increase use of cell phones, i.e. second-hand cell phone use.

The telecom industry stands to make billions from the dismantling of the telephone landlines. It is reasonable that they be mandated to cover the cost of accommodating people with disabilities.

There really should be an honest evaluation of the science available on the possible health effects of cell phones. The industry has been very good at keeping this discussion side-tracked by only acknowledging the heating effect, and totally ignoring the non-thermal effects on the brain. An honest evaluation of this issue should also consider the fact that industry-funded studies generally show no problems, while independently funded studies generally do show effects. Cigarette science is not limited to the tobacco industry.