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MEASUREMENT AND ANALYSIS OF RF EME LEVELS FROM THE TELSTRA MOBILE TELEPHONE BASE STATION LOCATED AT RAPID CREEK, NORTHERN TERRITORY

INTRODUCTION

The Electromagnetic Energy Public Health Issues Committee requested the Australian Radiation Laboratory measure the exposure levels of radiofrequency (RF) electromagnetic energy (EME) radiated from mobile telephone base stations as part of the public information component of the RF EME program. Local Governments were asked to nominate mobile telephone base stations at two sites per capital city, which were of concern to local communities. The intent of the measurements was to determine if the level of RF EME over the frequency band 870 megahertz (MHz) to 960 MHz around a nominated site complied with the public exposure limit of 200 microwatt per centimetre squared ($\mu\text{W}/\text{cm}^2$) recommended by the Australian Standard AS/NZS 2772.1(Int) - 1998¹.

This report details the measurements made around a Telstra mobile telephone base station situated nearby Chrisp Street, Rapid Creek, N.T. and adjacent to the Essington School. This base station was nominated by the Darwin Council. The base station antennae on this site are the common panel antennae which divide the area around a base station into three sectors. The antennae are on a 25 metre tower. The signals radiated are for digital mobile telephone base stations (GSM) and operate within the frequency band 935 MHz to 960 MHz.

MEASUREMENT METHOD

The method of measurement is detailed in the Appendix. In brief, three separate measurements were performed. These were:

- measurement of all other significant RF EME signals from such sources as TV, FM radio and AM radio, as well as mobile telephone base stations. This measurement was performed adjacent to the Essington School car park and is referred to as the environmental RF EME levels;
- measurement of the base station signals conducted over a 24 hour period. This measurement was performed on top of the Essington school building; and
- mapping the strength of signals radiated from the base station along the major roads surrounding the base station.

SURVEY RESULTS

Graphs displaying the measured levels are shown at the rear of the report. The graphs depict the following:

Figure 1. Pie chart of all significant environmental RF EME levels including base station signals;

Figure 2. Variation of EME level over a 24 hour period; and

Figure 3. Colour coded map of Rapid Creek area showing the level of base station signals along the main roads.

ENVIRONMENTAL RF EME LEVELS AT RAPID CREEK

Most RF signals around Rapid Creek are present throughout the day and come from a variety of communication sources including AM radio, FM radio, television and other broadcast services.

The dominant signal in Rapid Creek came from AM radio stations. The AM radio signals at the monitoring site contributed 82.9% (refer Figure 1) of the total RF EME level of $0.0069 \mu\text{W}/\text{cm}^2$, while the sum of all GSM base station EME levels was 2.82% of the total or $0.00020 \mu\text{W}/\text{cm}^2$.

RF EME levels have significant variations over short distances due to reflections from buildings and the ground. Hence, the ratio of signal levels from all sources can be expected to change as a consequence of local conditions. However, it is reasonable to assume that if a measurement of

RF EME from all sources was made at other locations around Rapid Creek, AM radio signals would still contribute the greatest proportion. AM radio signals have a long wave length and are poorly absorbed by the human body. The GSM base station signals present at the time of the measurement were only 2.82% of the total signal and five times less than the FM radio signals.

RF EME EXPOSURE LEVELS FROM TELSTRA TOWER

The highest level of RF EME from the Telstra base station around the tower at Rapid Creek was $0.0005 \mu\text{W}/\text{cm}^2$ or 0.00025% of the AS/NZS 2772.1 public limit. The highest level in a residential area was $0.0005 \mu\text{W}/\text{cm}^2$, with an average over the surveyed area of $0.0000078 \mu\text{W}/\text{cm}^2$. The RF levels fell away by a factor of 1000 at a distance of approximately 2 km.

Figure 2 indicates how the number of telephone calls varies over a 24 hour period. At 100% activity, the base station is handling the absolute maximum capacity that any base station can provide. This requires four transmitters to deliver full power into the antennae and allows the maximum number of telephone calls to be handled and is operating at 100% activity. Not all base stations have four transmitters, but four is used as the maximum should further traffic demands require them. The minimum operation of a base station requires one transmitter to be in operation and operates at full power even when not handling any calls and is indicated as 25% on the graph. This usually occurs after midnight on most sites. As more people use the network, additional transmitters are turned on, with each allowing up to eight simultaneous telephone calls. Voice communication occurs through the sequential transmission of brief packets of digital data. RF EME emission levels are therefore proportional to the activity of the base station. At Rapid Creek there was little change of activity throughout the day, however the activity did increase after about 8 AM. At the highest activity level of the Rapid Creek base station, the resulting RF EME levels were approximately 1.25 times the minimum activity. When averaged over 24 hr, the activity was 27% of full capacity or 1.08 times the minimum. At busy base stations it is possible that a four fold change in RF EME levels may occur as a consequence of variation in telephone traffic during the day.

The accompanying map ARF EME LEVELS@ (Figure 3) shows the average RF EME levels on a colour coded map. The highest signal levels are indicated by the larger coloured circles, while

progressively smaller circles indicate decreasing levels.

CONCLUSION

The highest level of RF EME from the Telstra tower when measured in the streets of Rapid Creek was $0.0005 \mu\text{W}/\text{cm}^2$, a level 400,000 less than that recommended by AS/NZS 2772.1 (Int) - 1998 for members of the general public. Measurements of overall RF EME from all sources indicate that the Telstra base station only slightly adds to the total RF EME level, with the largest contribution coming from AM radio and to a lesser extent, FM radio, all of which service the population of Darwin.

Michael Bangay

EMR and Optical Radiation Group

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REFERENCE

(1) AS/NZS 2772.1(Int)-1998, " Radiofrequency fields Part 1: Maximum Exposure Levels - 3 kHz to 300 GHz" Standards Australia.

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Monica Grollo performed many of the tests trialing the measurement procedures and helped with the data analysis.

APPENDIX 1

Method of RF EME Measurement around Mobile Telephone Base Stations

1. Equipment

All measurements were made with a Tektronix model 2712 spectrum analyser. This equipment functions as a sophisticated radio receiver, which allows each received radio signal to be analysed, allowing the accurate measurement of magnitude and frequency¹. Recording of data from the spectrum analyser was performed by a lap-top personal computer (PC) which has a PCMCIA-GPIB communication card connection with the analyser. The PC controls the operation of the analyser and records all relevant data. The PC also logged position information derived from a Global Positioning System (GPS) receiver operating in differential mode. Signals measured by the analyser over the bands of interest were received by the following antenna:

- *Low frequency signals* (AM radio); loop antenna;
EMCO model 6502 active loop, frequency response: 0.01 MHz - 30 MHz.
- *Very High Frequencies* (FM radio and TV); bi-conical antenna;
A.H. Systems model SAS 200/541, frequency response: 20 - 320 MHz.
- *Ultra High Frequency* (UHF TV, mobile telephone); log periodic antenna
A.H. Systems model SAS 200/510, frequency response: 300 MHz - 1000 MHz.
- *Mobile phone frequencies*; magnetic base vehicle roof mount antenna;
supplied by Telstra Shop, frequency response: 870 MHz - 960 MHz.

Each antenna is calibrated to determine its receiving performance - this factor (gain) is used for the calculations of RF EME. The overall uncertainty of the measurements is estimated to be +/- 6dB.

¹ The spectrum analyser measures the level of received signal in the power unit dBm. Calculation of field strength and hence power density requires a knowledge of the receiving antenna properties and system losses. Power density is commonly expressed in the unit of microwatt per centimetre squared ($\mu\text{W}/\text{cm}^2$) and is calculated using the electric field strength and assumes far field conditions where the wave impedance is 377 ohms.

2. Environmental Measurements

The environmental levels of RF EME were measured according to the following protocol:

- All signals with power densities greater than 1% of the observed maximum for each frequency band were recorded individually.
- Paging system signals at VHF and UHF frequencies signals are intermittent, of short duration and with numerous close spaced narrow band carrier signals. Therefore, such signals were measured when observed and recorded if greater than 1% of the highest broadcast signal source. The sum of power densities in each frequency band were reported.
- Other signals, such as emergency services (police, ambulance etc.) and taxis, were recorded when observed.
- If possible, measurements were made in locations that maintain direct line-of-sight with known RF sources, at a height of approximately 1.7 m above ground. Where practical, measurement antennae were positioned in open areas away from likely sources of reflection. Antennas were positioned and oriented so as to obtain maximum signal strength for the particular frequency band being measured.

The above signals were measured during the day over a period of approximately one hour, at a location within 500 m of the base station.

3. Mobile Telephone Base Station RF EME Measurements

24 hour measurements were used to determine the exposure levels from all mobile telephone services operating in the vicinity of the nominated location. This measurement was performed by continuously logging the signal data for both AMPS and GSM mobile phone systems that comes from only one transmitting antenna. The recorded data was used to determine time dependent “activity factors” for both AMPS and GSM systems over a 24 hour period. Activity factors are determined by counting the number of active time slots for the GSM network and the number of channels present for the AMPS network. (Note: GSM has a minimum of eight time slots and a maximum of 32, whereas AMPS has a minimum of one channel and a maximum of 32 channels (full capacity) for a given sector). These measurements were performed by the analyser continuously scanning across the mobile telephone frequency band; the number of scans is dependant on the number of signals present in the band. The “activity factors” are the average of the scans performed over a six minute period; higher “activity factors” may occur over a shorter period.

Analysing software processed only the signals identified as belonging to the base station in question.

4. Street Mapping of Power Density

Additional measurements but necessarily of limited nature, were made in the vicinity of the base station to determine the RF EME distribution in the streets around the base station. The average activity factor for the 24 hour activity measurement was applied to these additional AMPS and GSM measurements for a better assessment of the daily levels at each survey location in the mapping area. This information is presented as a map. The measurement was performed by equipment installed in a vehicle which recorded both signal data and position information. The received signals tracked by the equipment were the control channels identified as belonging to the base station in question.

Environmental RF EME Levels

Essington School, Rapid Creek

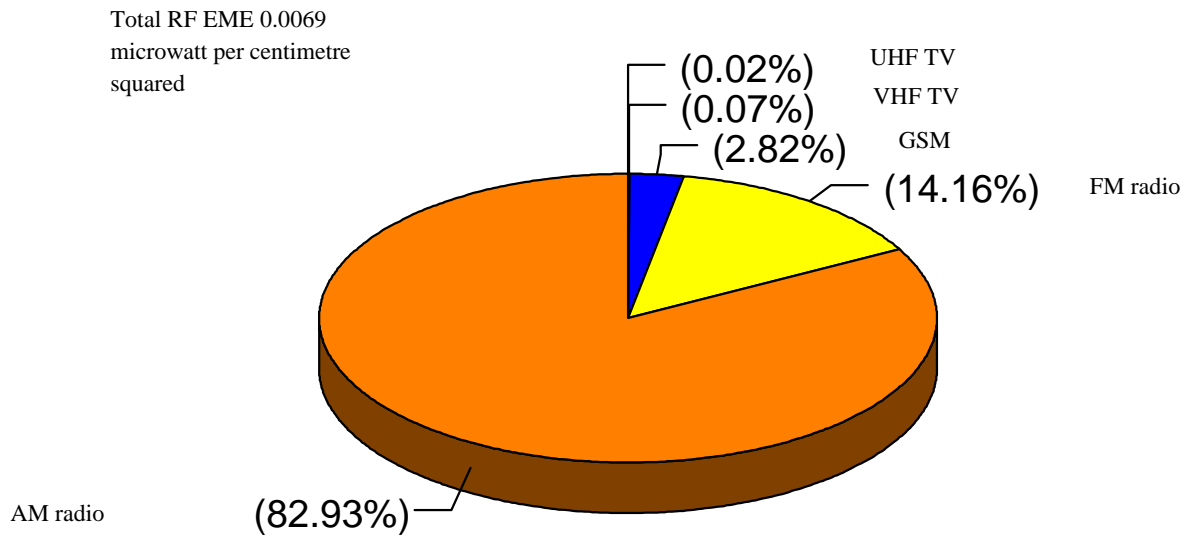


Figure 1

24 hour Activity of Base Station

Essington School, Rapid Creek

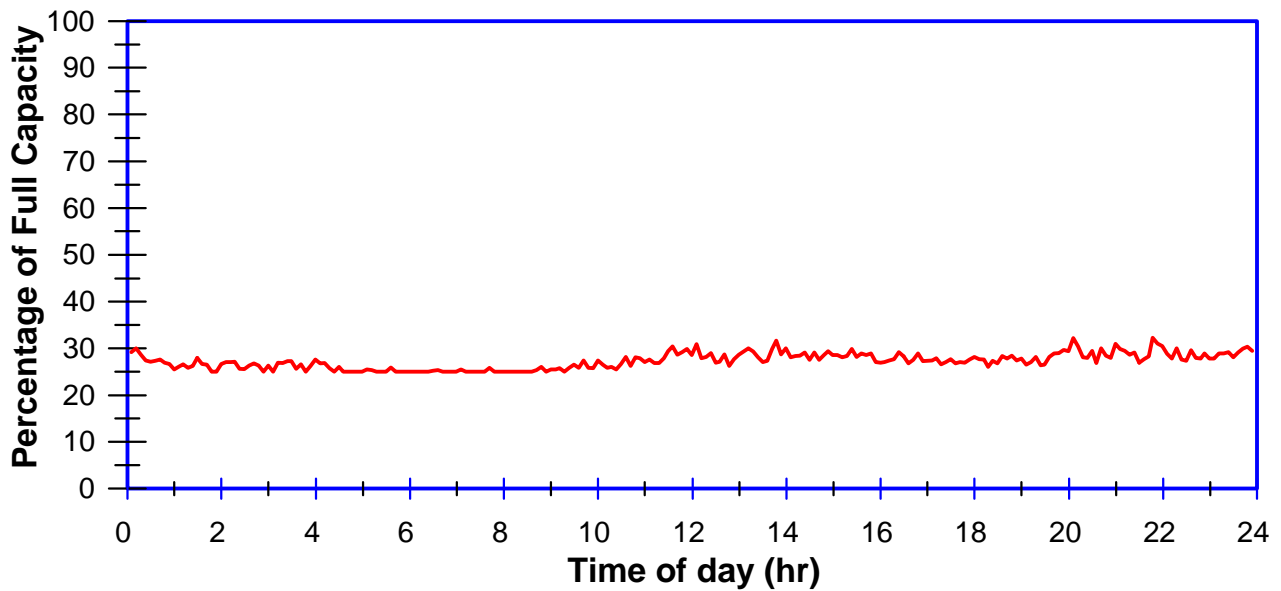


Figure 2

Rapid Creek RF EME Levels

Telstra GSM Base Station

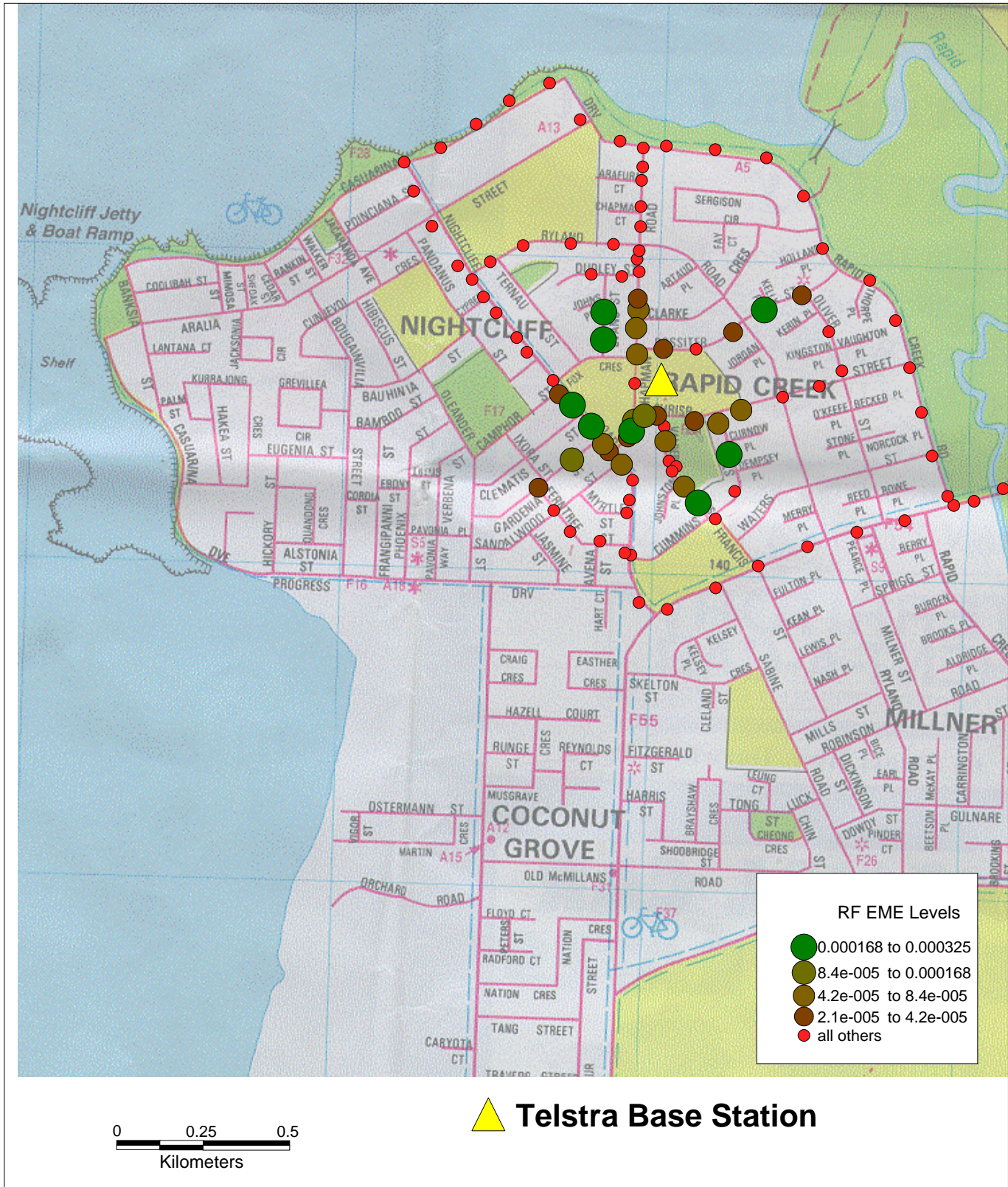


Figure 3