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978-0-521-52082-9 - Cellular Phones, Public Fears, and a Culture of Precaution

Adam Burgess

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Cellular Phones, Public Fears, and a Culture of Precaution

This book is the first account of the health panic surrounding cellular phones and their supporting network of transmitting towers that developed in the mid-1990s. Treating the issue as more “social construction” than evident scientific problem, it tells the story of how this originally American anxiety diffused internationally, having an even bigger impact in countries such as Italy. Burgess highlights the contrasting reactions to the issue ranging from positive indifference in Finland to those such as in the United Kingdom, where precautionary measures were taken. These differences are located within a culture driven by institutional insecurity with regard to alleged health risks that first appeared in the United States and is now most evident in Europe. Anxieties about cell phone radio waves are also related historically to reactions to technologies such as x-rays and “microwave suspicions” about television. In addition, Burgess outlines a history and sociology of what is, despite media-driven fear, a spectacularly successful device.

Sharon Wood

Adam Burgess received his undergraduate degree from the University of London and his Ph.D. from the University of Kent. He is the author of one previous book and numerous journal articles and book chapters. Burgess has been a lecturer at the University of Reading and is now a lecturer in sociology at the University of Bath.

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For my two boys, Carl and Alec

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Sharon Wood

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BSE	Bovine spongiform encephalopathy
CPRE	Council for the Protection of Rural England
CTIA	Cellular Telecommunications Industry Association
CWA	Communications Workers of America
CWTI	Council on Wireless Technology Industries
ELF	Extremely low frequency
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
EPL	Environmental Protection Law
ERMAC	Electromagnetic Radiation Management Advisory Council
FACA	Federal Advisory Committee Act
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
GPRS	General Packet Radio Service
GSM	Global System for Mobile Communications
IARC	International Agency for Research on Cancer
IEGMP	Independent Expert Group on Mobile Phones
ICNIRP	International Committee on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection
ISPESL	National Institute for Prevention and Safety at Work (Italy)
KCC	Kent County Council
LGA	Local Government Association
MAUK	Mast Action U.K.
MCF	Mobile Carriers Forum
NCI	National Cancer Institute
NIFATT	Northern Ireland Families Against Transmission Towers
NRPB	National Radiological Protection Board (U.K.)
SAR	Specific absorption rate

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SIM	Subscriber Information Module
SMS	Short Message Service
3G	Third Generation
VDT	Video display terminal
WAP	Wireless Application Protocol
WHO	World Health Organization

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