

Waves roll right by

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LOGAN, Utah — Warnings about the health risks from exposure to magnetic and electrical fields — such as those produced by power lines and household appliances — are often the result of faulty research, a science meeting was told.

Richard Lyons said at a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science that he has found studies showing increased cancer rates linked to exposure to electrical or magnetic fields "inaccurate, inconsistent, incomparable and unlikely."

Lyons, of the federal occupational health division, said the diseases in question are still considered very rare.

Scientists query studies showing risks to health in electric fields

For example, he said, in a population of 100,000 people, figures show five may get leukemia, one may get brain cancer, and fewer than 20 may get malignant melanoma or lymphoma.

While those rates tend to increase among people in certain occupations or geographic areas, studies rarely accounted for other factors that may promote the dis-

eases, linking them only to exposure to electric or magnetic fields.

Janie Page-Blanchard, a researcher with Bechtel Corp., said it is difficult to isolate exposure to low-frequency electrical fields from other health risk factors, and some researchers have not even tried to account for other factors.

For example, one study that found electrical workers had an increased incidence of certain cancers did not take into account continual exposure to strong solvents and chemicals used on the job.

"These diseases are so rare I think our research dollars could be better spent elsewhere," added Dr. Wallace Sampson, of the Stanford School of Medicine. "Heart disease and smoking are clearly far more deadly than possible exposure to electrical and magnetic fields."