

What Will We Worry About Next with Smartphones?

Shôn Ellerton, July 27, 2025

Ever since we've had mobile phones and smartphones, there has been one worry after another fuelling paranoia over their safety.



If there's nothing else to worry about, it's guaranteed that something else will take its place.

Such is the case of the humble mobile phone. A device that has been demonised to the core for nearly three decades due to its alleged harmful effects of,... no, not social media, but *radiation*!

When's the last big piece of news that you've stumbled on that hankers on the ill effects of radiation to the human body from mobile phones?

Who cares anymore?

Thousands of people pass you by in the nearby shopping precinct with their ears and eyes glued to their mobile phones. Or, more correctly these days, smartphones, unless you're one of the old-school types who still cherishes the ancient Nokias and Ericssons and proudly boasting that you're only interested in using them for making phone calls and sending text messages.

I would think that you'd be in agreement with me that not much in the way of paranoid news flows out concerning the dangers of mobile phone radiation. There's still regular concerns about the erection of mobile phone towers, but this is mostly due to NIMBYs not liking the possibility of having a great big ugly tower near to their house. Having worked around twenty-five years in the mobile

phone tower rollout industry, I have a reasonably high understanding of how this all works.

It was different back in the late 90s and early 2000s. There was a genuine fear of radiation emitted from mobile phone towers largely due to utter ignorance and paranoia, most of which was created by the mainstream press, as it always does. Ignorance coupled with heightened emotion usually plays the primary factor of promoting fear.

Back in my early telecommunications part of my career, I was one of those engineer scouts looking for places to position mobile phone towers around the city of London. On one occasion, it was on top of a featureless grey block of flats in the not so salubrious area of southeast London near Elephant & Castle. Treading carefully so as to avoid the bird scat and litter strewn across the worn-away rooftop, I found a perfect little spot to situate a steel grillage as to support three panels antennas and some outdoor base station equipment. If you look carefully from the window of most high-rise buildings, you'd be sure to spot one or two of them on nearby rooftops.

A few minutes later, this angry middle-aged woman, a stout and wholly unattractive [Nora Batty](#)-lookalike complete with apron and headband stormed at me whilst waving a broom shouting at the top of her voice ordering me to get off the rooftop. She started with an explosion of expletives and accusing me of wanting to kill everyone living in the block of flats from radiation poisoning. She kept on approaching me, and rather than trying to educate and console her with a perfectly rational explanation, decided that the best plan of action be to abandon ship. The impression I got was that this woman looked like she would not be entirely upset if I was bumped off the edge of the building.

She was absolutely livid.

The telecommunications industry soon changed its terminology to try to appease the masses by changing any reference of *radiation* and calling it *transmission* in public speeches or press releases. The little triangular yellow warning signs still said *non-ionising radiation*, but only very near the antennas themselves. For the curious, *non-ionising radiation* is that type of radiation in the lower frequency spectra of electromagnetic radiation below the upper band of ultraviolet going down through visible light, infrared, microwaves and radio waves. Mobile phone signals are within the microwave area meaning that they heat up water, which is not a good thing if you're too near to them. *Ionising radiation*, however, is that

upper band of electromagnetic radiation from upper ultraviolet to X-Rays to Gamma Rays and beyond where exposure to such has the ability to damage molecular structures. You know. Ripping off an electron or proton from here or there and doing ‘interesting’ things to human DNA.

You get the picture.

For many years around this time, there was no shortage of news of the dangers of, not only the antennas mounted on the towers, but the actual use of mobile phones too near to the body. Much of the fear was based on the unknown because there wasn’t much in the way of many years of extensive research to prove if mobile phone usage is harmful to the human body. As for the towers, the press accentuated the dangers and often alarmed the public on the terrible dangers posed by the spread of mobile phone towers. Some press outlets got a little silly espousing the possibility that babies would be born with two heads or one leg or some other strange deformity. But as the years went on by, it transpired that nothing of the sort happened and, by the 2020s, not many people gave concern to the rise of the number of mobile phone towers, at least, not on health and safety issues.

However, there was a growing case of a possibility that the use of a mobile phone against one’s head for an extended period of time *could* have some ill-effects. Many articles were written on the dangers of using mobile phones too near to the human body claiming that the *specific absorption rate*, or *SAR*, could be high enough to have an adverse effect on the human brain. Ironically, the phone emitted more power in the form of radiation when *far away* from the mobile phone tower implying that using a phone near to one’s head when far away from a tower poses a higher risk of SAR. Incidentally, this is why your mobile phone discharges its battery far quicker when using it in locations far away from a phone tower. In a figurative way, the mobile phone has to ‘shout’ to get to the tower. Not only that, it often gets warmer as well due to the increased power emitted.

Holding a mobile phone against one’s head may possibly not be the best thing to do for extended periods of time. But technology came to the rescue with the introduction of two-way headphones which could be connected straight into the phone.

Problem solved?

No.

One worry out the window and another comes in.

Not long after, there was news story after news story of the *wires* themselves connecting the headphones to the phone that created a problem acting as another antenna which posed damage to the human body. This theory, of course, was utterly ridiculous and was eventually consigned to the barrel of quackeries and old-wives tales in less than a year. Nowadays, we have wireless intracanal earphones which most people use, which, quite frankly, pose a very serious risk of hearing loss.

Rolling on to the 2020s, apart from the NIMBYs complaining about phone towers being built too close to them and, at the same time, complaining that they don't have any phone coverage, we hardly hear anything at all about the deleterious effects of mobile phone usage. Unfortunately, when very little is reported because we've become tired of hearing it over and over on the dangers of the effects posed by radiation by phone towers and smartphones themselves, the paranoid lot have another trick up their sleeves.

The mobile phone generation jump.

From 1G to 2G to 3G to 4G, and, more recently, to 5G, *every* jump in mobile phone generation has caused an uproar with conspiracy artists and paranoid 'Kevins' and 'Karens'.

I apologise for those named either by Karen or Kevin, but I do love so, how those names are picked on so unfairly.

The introduction of 5G which happened to nearly occur the same time as COVID-19, brought along some incredibly bizarre but very amusing quack theories, for example, of those in power using 5G in conjunction with the issuance of COVID vaccines for the sole purpose of controlling our minds to be subservient to the so-called New Order. A Brave New World of modern day Soma if you will.

Come 2025, I don't hear much of the 5G paranoia anymore. Most people use it with their smartphones, including most of those who shunned it in the first place. They've either got bored with it or forgotten all about it. Moreover, so many don't even know what on earth 5G is anyway often confusing it with 5G on their home wireless networks, which simply refers to using the 5 *gigahertz* frequency option instead of the 2.4 one.

Let's just say that the term, *smartphone*, has been quite... how should I put this... smart! When we think of *mobile phones*, for some reason or another, we think of *radiation*, but when it comes to *smartphones*?

OK. So there's nothing more to worry about.

Ah. But there is.

Now, it's the *content* that now worries our sheep-like ignorant public.

Forgetting the fact that the Internet has been with us for over thirty years and that there has been a shedload of quite horrible content available which has been out there during that time which *could* cause mental or physically-implied harm, the ignorant public at large need something else to worry about.

Those in power take enormous advantage of this state of worry by relaying to the masses that the *content* available through smartphones, and, of course, other devices connected to the Internet pose enormous harm. Australia took the helm and enacted a piece of legislation which will make it illegal for minors under the age of sixteen to access social media put to be in place by December 2025. How this will be achieved is not certain, but I am certain it will fail on technical grounds and will be shelved not long after.

The government of Australia has a perfect opportunity to appeal to the emotions of its people that there *is* something to worry about. Regardless of the benefits that social media has provided to many, including minors, it's not very difficult to focus and accentuate the stories of the relative few who have committed harm to themselves being the result of being a victim in social media circles. The majority of the public soak all these stories up like little lapdogs and then praise the government for taking action against those nasty social media tech giants corrupting our youth.

There is something very dangerous about the attitude of someone viewing the government needing to take the position as being a paternal figure rather than simply doing its job by keeping the economy afloat and defending its shores.

Given a couple of years from now, much of this will be forgotten.

If we go back to the beginning.

The paranoia over radiation from mobile phone towers.

The paranoia over using mobile phones near one's head.

The paranoia because the wire connecting the headphone from the mobile to the head is a problem.

And now, the paranoia that the *content* that can be accessed through a smartphone.

Heck, I haven't even included the paranoia relating to those using smartphones whilst using a vehicle.

What will be the *next* worry?