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Police blame health crisis on radio mast

By Nic Fleming

(Filed: 14/08/2004)

Six people including a chief inspector, other officers and civilian workers at a police station have blamed debilitating health complaints on a mast for a controversial new communications system yards from their desks.

Chief Insp Steve Strong and his staff reportedly believe their bouts of dizziness and severe headaches began when a [transmitter for the Tetra radio network was put up](#).

Around 25 people living near the mast at the station in North Walsham, Norfolk, have complained of similar symptoms. Other reported health complaints include repeated nosebleeds, especially among children, disturbed sleep and skin problems.

The officers, who have been referred to the force's doctor, are said to have been warned not to discuss their worries publicly. A source said: "They don't know which way to turn. They have been forbidden from speaking out.

"They are caught between going to work in a place that is making them ill and the huge financial and political pressures that demand Tetra must be a success at all costs."

Last month the family of Pc Neil Dring, a Leicestershire police motorcyclist who died of cancer of the oesophagus, said he had complained of headaches when he began using his Tetra handset and that he was convinced it was to blame for his condition.

The Government's £2.9 billion Tetra system is being rolled out to all 53 police forces in England, Scotland



The mast at the North Walsham station

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and Wales by next spring.

It is already being used by 65,000 officers in 40 forces. The digital handsets boast improvements including better security and coverage, the ability to receive pictures and data, and emergency buttons.

Hundreds of officers have said they believe their health is suffering and campaign groups are fighting against siting the system's 3,500 transmitters near their homes, schools and workplaces.

Residents, police and politicians in North Walsham are angry with O2 Airwaves because its contractors put up a transmitter just days after planning permission for a new, taller mast was refused. Negotiations about finding an alternative site are continuing.

Chris Warren, of the Norfolk Police Federation, said: "The federation would not want to see any piece of equipment brought in that is demonstrably injurious to our members. But there is no scientific evidence that Tetra is injurious to officers' health."

O2 Airwaves said: "All the medical evidence would suggest the symptoms reported are not connected with the use of radio technology."

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