Airwave Health Monitoring Study
Information Leaflet

Dear participant,

Airwave is a digital radio communications system designed for the Police service in England, Wales and Scotland. With backing from the Police Federation, UNISON and Police management, the Airwave Health Monitoring Study will examine possible long term health implications for Police personnel related to use of this technology. The Police Federation’s position on Airwave and health is at: http://www.polfed.org/PFNews_Airwave_Issue24.pdf.

Please take the time to read through this information letter to learn about what participation in the Study involves. If you have any questions or comments about the Study, please contact a member of the Medical Research Team at the address above.

Thank you for your assistance and for participating in the Airwave Health Monitoring Study.

Yours faithfully

Professor Paul Elliott FMedSci.
Why do we need Airwave health monitoring?

Some people have been concerned about the possible health effects of mobile phones for several years now. In 2000, The Independent Expert Group on Mobile Phones under the Chairmanship of Sir William Stewart looked into the matter, and published a report *Mobile Phones and Health* (the “Stewart Report”).

The Stewart Report found no obvious health effects associated with mobile phones, but it did mention that radio signals with modulations around 16 Hz might have an effect on the body. The report said that the evidence was inconclusive, but did recommend precaution. Because the signals from Airwave (TETRA) handsets contain a modulation at 17.6 Hz, the Home Office asked the National Radiological Protection Board’s independent Advisory Group on non-ionizing Radiation (AGNIR) for further advice. In 2001, AGNIR published a report, *Possible Health Effects from TETRA*, which concluded:

> Although areas of uncertainty remain about the biological effects of low level RF radiation in general, including modulated signals, current evidence suggests that it is unlikely that the special features of TETRA mobile terminals and repeaters pose a hazard to health.

The report also recommended further research to clear up any areas of uncertainty. The Home Office accepted all the recommendations, and commissioned further research, of which this Study is part.

What is the aim of the Study?

The aim is to investigate any possible long term health impacts associated with Airwave use amongst police personnel.

What does participation involve?

You will find a short questionnaire with this information leaflet. This questionnaire will enrol you in the Study, and allow us to assess your Airwave use and relate it to your other clinical and lifestyle factors.

Who is eligible to be part of the Study?

The Study is open to all Police personnel, including staff employees, and those who do not currently use Airwave. Following a successful pilot in 2004 - 05, the Study is now being rolled out nationally on a force-by-force basis.

Why should I participate?

The findings made by this Study will provide vital information in assessing whether Airwave is harmful to health, and will inform future treatment of illness, health promotion, diagnosis and prevention of disease.

Jan Berry, Chairman of the Police Federation of England and Wales, said:

> “The Police Federation has actively campaigned for good quality independent research to ascertain if there are any health effects on the users of Airwave. That’s why it is important that we all play our role and I would encourage you to find the time to participate in this important research. It will only produce truly valid results if there is a high level of participation from police officers. Please help if you can.”
Who is conducting the Study?

The Study is being conducted by the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health at Imperial College London. The Principal Investigator is Professor Paul Elliott. The project is funded by the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA), and has the support of the Police Federation, Unison, and the Police force.

Has the Study been ethically approved?

Yes, the Study has been approved by the North West Ethics Research Committee, an NHS body. The Study also has its own Ethical Governance Committee (EGC) that includes independent academic experts and a “lay” member nominated by the Police Federation.

Health screening

Enrolment into the study will also provide opportunity for participants to receive a free and confidential health screen, which will allow us to assess your current state of health and greatly inform our analysis. Health screening is a popular component of the Study, which was requested by over three-quarters of police personnel in the pilot phase.

You will receive a detailed report that will contain all of the results from your visit that are useful in assessing your current state of health. This includes the physical measurements, blood tests and an assessment of your ECG (electrocardiogram). No-one outside the Study team (and only with your consent, your GP) will see the results, which are confidential between us.

Health screening is being rolled out on a force-by-force basis on a different timetable than the questionnaire. Please contact the Study team or check our website for information about the rollout of the health screen in your force.

Why do you need my written consent?

Your participation in the Study is voluntary. By signing the consent section of the questionnaire, you are confirming your willingness to take part in the Study, and to follow up your health in the long term.

Because being a part of the Study requires your consent, we are unable to use questionnaires submitted anonymously, or which have not been signed.

How do you follow up my health records?

We follow up your health records on databases authorised by the NHS to hold these data. Our main sources are the cancer and mortality registers in England & Wales, and Scotland. We also intend to obtain information on Hospital Episodes (HES). We may apply to use other NHS databases as they become available, but any such application will be subject to approval by the relevant NHS committees.

Why do you need access to my personnel records?

We ask for date-of-birth details and home contact (in case the address you give us is transcribed inaccurately); we also ask for job function, educational history and ethnicity which are important in controlling for occupational or socioeconomic factors.

We need to know if you change Police force or retire, so that we can accurately track your usage of Airwave. Information on sickness absence and records of the date and reason for retirement allow us to track incidence of general ill-health that may be caused by use of Airwave, but which are not picked up in NHS records.
Who will have access to my data?

Only those researchers who are part of the Airwave Health Monitoring Study are permitted access to any of the data that is held about you with regard to the Study. Neither the NPIA nor your employer will be able to access your data.

In the future, Imperial College and other research institutions may carry out research using the data provided by the Study. Any such research will be undertaken in the light of advice given by the EGC (Ethics and Governance Committee), which includes a lay member nominated by the Police Federation, and will be approved by an independent ethics committee on a case-by-case basis. You will never be personally identified to any researcher outside the Airwave Health Monitoring Study team. The results of any research that is published, whether by Imperial College or anyone else, will never identify you.

Confidentiality and privacy

There are no circumstances, short of a court order, where we will discuss any of the information we hold about you with any third party. This prohibition includes the NPIA and your police force.

This research project is registered for data protection and the requirements of the Act apply in full. All personal information collected during the Study will be used solely for medical research purposes and will be stored and disposed of in a secure manner.

The long term store of data used by the Study is a “Private Network” of computers run by Imperial College which is dedicated to the Study and has no external connections (researchers are unable, for example, to access the Internet from the Private Network). The facilities have been reviewed and considered suitable by a police agency.

Can I withdraw from the Study?

Yes, you can withdraw from the Study at any time without giving reasons. You will have to inform the Study team of your wish by phone or email or letter. We will then send you a Withdrawal from Study Form which has to be signed by you and sent back to the research team at Imperial College.