

COAI and TAIPA urge for uniform tower guidelines across Maharashtra

Mumbai, October 24, 2013: A uniform mobile tower installation policy for the country will go a long way in the future development of mobile telecoms in India said COAI, the apex body of mobile telecom companies and TAIPA, the apex body of towers companies. Both the industry bodies have urged the Maharashtra government to adopt Central guidelines in this regard.

COAI, along with the Tower and Infrastructure Providers Association (TAIPA) told the media that central norms were drafted in consultation with the States including Maharashtra and the industry and that the guidelines on installation of towers and the emission norms, as issued by the Central Department of Telecommunications, is one of the safest in the world. Any major deviation from the Central guidelines will lead to severe network failures and massive service disruptions for a city like Mumbai and lead to grave inconvenience for the mobile phone users. The emission norms in India are so low that there is no need for any exclusion zone for erecting a tower, be it a school or a hospital. The industry bodies offered to work with the State Government to ensure that mobile networks in the State are not affected in anyway and all fears of public health are addressed.

Mr. Rajan S. Mathews, Director General of COAI, said, *“The telecom industry is sensitive to the public health concerns of Mumbaikars. Despite following all the norms set out by the WHO, the ITU and the government of India, certain misconceptions are being propagated about cellphones and mobile towers. We’re convinced on the widespread awareness of safety aspects of mobiles, and will further reassure the citizens that their mobile emissions and that from towers cause no health hazard, as we follow the best practices in this regard. As recently as in Sept 20, 2013, the WHO clearly stated that ‘Studies to date provide no indication that environmental exposure to RF fields, such as from base stations, increases the risk of cancer or any other disease’.”*

Mr Tilak Raj Dua, Senior Director, Tower and Infrastructure Providers Association (TAIPA), commented, *“The industry will adhere to central guidelines for setting up mobile towers in any part of the country including Maharashtra and Mumbai. These guidelines are very elaborate, comprehensive and address all concerns. These guidelines have been made after detailed discussions and feedback from all the stakeholders including State representatives. These towers follow all norms of emissions and permissions set by the government of India and will continue to do so for any amendment laid out in the future too. The DOT guidelines aim at formulation of State-wide Uniform policies for creation of this critical infrastructure and avoid undue interference and multiple frameworks from such authorities so as to achieve the enshrined objectives of National Telecom Policy. We sincerely request for a single Uniform Tower Installation Policy for the State of Maharashtra be released at the earliest.”*

The industry bodies felt that the public apprehensions related to health hazards from mobile towers is chiefly due to lack of information and misconceptions arising out of misguided activism. The industry, in a joint initiative with the Central and State governments, will introduce an extensive citizen education campaign on the safety, friendliness and usage of mobile services to address this issue. Industry norms across the globe on emissions are guided by UN bodies like WHO and its associates like ICINRP and the Government of India has adopted one tenth of these internationally accepted norms.

The Indian scientific community too had taken note of the alleged health hazards from mobile towers as claimed by certain groups, and had expressed their strong views to the Government recently. In their recent letter to the DoT, 25 professors of IITs and IISc had opined that “there is no further knowledge available that warrants a change in safety recommendations of mobile emissions” and had urged the government to exercise caution in taking ad-hoc decisions regarding restrictions on tower locations and had also cautioned against creation of unnecessary panic and fear among citizens.

The Department of Telecommunications (DOT), Government of India had issued guidelines for installation of mobile towers in August 1, 2013 after a year of consultations including State Governments, industry and public. The guidelines recognize that mobile towers are critical infrastructure with no potential public health hazard and hence towers are permitted on all locations irrespective of land usage. There are no exclusion zones or restriction on installation of towers on schools or hospitals as the EMF emission levels in India are 90% lesser and safer than the WHO approved levels prevalent globally and hence provide adequate safeguard for all segments of the population.