

Interview of Dr. Robert O. Becker by Dan Rather on CBS' 60 Minutes (13 February 1977)

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Way back in 1977, the late visionary scientist Robert O. Becker was expressing his concerns that the electrical frequencies around us might be causing human health problems. Here's a transcript of some historical footage that is very relevant today, as we wrestle with the complex, energy-related illnesses of the 21st century.



Dan Rather: You may have heard of it—a Navy project called Seafarer. The original name was Sanguine. It's a \$700,000,000 submarine communications system that for the past decade has been a very expensive idea in search of a home. In every part of the country where the Navy has set foot talking Seafarer, there has been an uproar. Homefolks, politicians, scientists—they all turn out to have at it. Will Seafarer ruin the scenery? Will it be a major target for enemy warheads? And most important, what about reports that it could be harmful to the people who would have to live with it?... Captain Charles Pollack is the man in charge.

Capt. Pollack: The antenna would have about 2400 miles of antenna cable. If you draw a line around the extremities of that antenna-arrayed layout, it would encompass about 4000 square miles.

Dan Rather: So, somewhere in the good old U.S. of A., Pollack has to string out 2400 miles of antenna cable, buried a few feet underground. It would look something like this—a pattern resembling loose strings in a tennis racket. The intersecting lines would be about 3½ miles apart, and the whole thing would cover 4000 square miles of field and forest—some of it along existing right-of-ways, like roads and powerlines, some of it through newly cleared paths. Is it safe?

Capt. Pollack: Yes, absolutely.

Dan Rather: Absolutely? Well not to people like this scientist. Are you telling me there's a possibility that electric current, generated in a fashion such as this, could possibly cause heart disease and/or stroke?

Dr. Becker: Yes.

Dan Rather: You have to know that that's a mind-blowing thought for a lot of people, including me?

Dr. Becker: I'm aware of that.

Dan Rather: Dr. Robert Becker is Chief of Orthopedic Surgery and a medical investigator for the Veterans Administration in Syracuse, New York. We have to pause here for a bit of explanation. Historically, the scientific community, almost in its entirety, has maintained that, to be harmed by electricity, you had to be shocked or burned; that the low-level doses surrounding us most of the time—from electrical appliances in the home, from power transmission lines or from the Navy's Seafarer project—could do us no harm. That's the Navy's argument. Now, are you telling me it's fair to say, accurate to say, that a housewife is exposed to more low frequencies in her home in the course of doing her day-to-day chores than she would be from Seafarer?

Capt. Pollack: Many, many times more.

Dan Rather: You're certain that is a scientific fact?

Capt. Pollack: That is a scientific fact.

Dan Rather: Dr. Becker wouldn't disagree with that. What he'd say is that you may not be safe, even in your kitchen. For twenty years, he and his staff have been experimenting on the effects, if any, of low-level radiation on living things. He is one of a small, but growing group of scientists around the world who are turning up information making them believe that low-level electrical fields do affect us. For instance, using very low voltage currents, he has made broken bones that wouldn't heal by themselves grow together again. And like most scientific discoveries, it's a double-edged sword. If those carefully controlled low-level currents can heal bones, well, it makes people like Becker wonder about uncontrolled electrical fields from household appliances, powerlines and Seafarer.

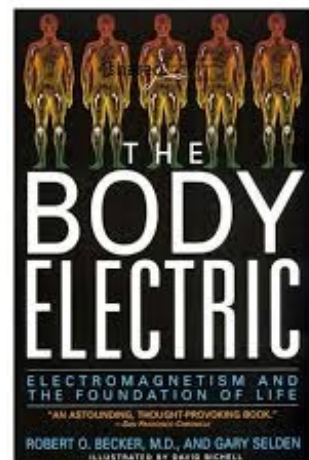
Dr. Becker: I was a member of the first *ad hoc* committee to evaluate the biological studies that were performed for Project Sanguine. And I most certainly sat there and listened to several studies that had very definite effects, yes. Animals that are exposed grow at a slower rate than control animals. A number of projects have shown this to be true. The second area in which definite effects do appear is that exposure to this type of field seems to produce stress.

Dan Rather: Is it true that the Navy repressed that report for better than two years?

Dr. Becker: The Navy did not disseminate the report widely.

Dan Rather: This is the report that he's talking about. It was done at the request of the Navy by a group of top scientists. They reviewed experiments performed on possible effects of ELF radiation on living things and raised some red flags. That was in 1973. The report finally got out a year ago.

Capt. Pollack: Now, in looking at some of the early experiments, there were effects noted. There were differences of opinion among—among the scientific people, as to whether those effects were significant. There were also differences of opinion as to whether they were deleterious. It's our position now, and I fully support that position, that we have not seen any significant deleterious effects that can be attributed to a Seafarer system....



Dan Rather: Of most concern to people, though, were those reports of what the grid might do to them. The Navy countered: More scientists were following up the original studies. But the folks here had heard stories about what happened to some of the original scientists.

Dr. Becker: We know of, I believe it's five, specific projects in which positive results were obtained, when the projects were terminated and the money just disappeared. There was no more to continue the work.

Dan Rather: Now, is this a definite pattern?

Dr. Becker: It appears to be.

Dan Rather: *That when a study begins to find that there may be adverse effects, that the money dries up?*

Dr. Becker: Not even adverse effects. *Any* effect.

Capt. Pollack: What we had to do is try and determine which of the research efforts appeared to be the most fruitful, where we should apply the money and where we should apply the resources in order to get the best overall understanding.

Dan Rather: Meanwhile, the Navy has called the National Academy of Sciences to oversee and evaluate further experiments. And the NAS Committee has issued a one-sentence interim report saying that, so far, they think Seafarer is safe. But Dr. Becker isn't impressed. Some members of that NAS panel have previously testified publicly that radiation, similar to that of Seafarer, isn't harmful. And Becker maintains it would be awkward for them to change their minds in public.

Dr. Becker: For example, if a person has already publicly gone on record that the voltage field from a transmission line, a million times stronger than that from the Sanguine antenna, is harmless, then obviously he cannot do an about-face and say the Sanguine antenna may be harmful. So that a number of people on this committee, I would feel, have a pre-bias.

Dan Rather: Is what you're trying to say that we're playing with a stacked deck?

Dr. Becker: I think so, yes.