
# Short Takes

February 4, 2011

Louis Slesin

**February 4**… Publication bias is a well-known problem — it's defined in a recent, widely read New Yorker article as "the tendency of scientists and scientific journals to prefer positive data over null results, which is what happens when no effect is found." This may be generally true, but once again, the usual rules don't apply to EMFs. Here researchers (and editors) are all too often more interested in publishing failures than successes. Actually, for EMFs, failure is success, promising financial rewards of one kind or another. This is an old story, but now Niels Kuster says enough is enough. In a broadside against the Bioelectromagnetics Society (BEMS), Kuster warns that the society is "threatened" by its "biased scientific culture." Kuster, a former president of the society and the head of IT'IS in Zurich, writes on the front page of its newsletter that "BEMS members allow their conditioned assumptions, prejudices, funding interests or lack of expertise to influence their ability to review or accept positive findings objectively." Kuster tells of how long it took Primo Schär of the University of Basel to publish a paper showing that power-frequency EMFs can lead to DNA breaks, a finding first shown by Henry Lai and N.P. Singh close to 15 years ago. Maria Scarfi in Naples, on the other hand, was able to get her failure to see a similar effect into print with, as Kuster puts it, "relative ease." Scarfi placed her paper in Radiation Research, which has long favored null results for EMFs. So much so that years ago it was nicknamed the journal of negative results. According to Kuster, BEMS is the society of negative results.