

Building Top Floors Closed After Brain Tumor Alert

By Lisa Macnamara
The Australian - UK
5-13-6

The top floors of a Melbourne office building were closed down yesterday and 100 people evacuated after a seventh worker in as many years was diagnosed with a brain tumour.

But Telstra insisted the mobile phone towers on the roof of the 17-storey RMIT University building were not linked to the cancer cluster.

Five academics - who worked on the top floor - and two general staff have suffered brain tumours since 1999. Six of the seven staff had worked at the Bourke Street premises for more than a decade. Two of the cases were malignant.

"We have briefed the staff and suspect further cases will be brought to our attention," RMIT vice-president of resources Steve Somogyi said yesterday.

The academics' union has demanded that RMIT pay for medical examinations of all staff working in the building after learning of a number of suspected new cases late yesterday.

"We're starting to get anecdotal reports of one or two other people who have passed away who have worked in the building," said Matthew McGowan, Victorian branch president of the National Tertiary Education Union.

RMIT recently called in a Melbourne doctor to assess information from the staff diagnosed with the tumours but he found no obvious link with "any specific environmental hazard", a university statement said.

Telstra, which along with Optus reportedly has mobile phone equipment on top of the building, said yesterday it would co-operate with the university's investigation. "This equipment complies with strict health and safety standards, and is regularly tested to ensure ongoing compliance," the phone company said.

While staff were "anxious and concerned", the university was initially reluctant to close the top floors, Mr McGowan said. "They were

reluctant at first because they didn't want to create a panic."

The university has started notifying students at the building, many of whom are from overseas.

However, serious concerns were not held for the students.

RMIT investigated radio frequency and air quality after the first two cases emerged in 1999 and 2001, but all the results were well below the recommended Australian standards, a university spokeswoman said.

"It was thoroughly tested," she said.

Yesterday's action was prompted after a third case was reported by the institution's occupational health and safety unit a month ago, when it emerged that other academics had also fallen ill.

"We're looking at everything around the area," the spokeswoman said.

But Mr McGowan said the university must be accountable for health and safety checks "across the board" after the initial testing in 2001 was not followed up.

"These cases have only coincidentally come to people's attention rather than through some systematic monitoring process," he said.

The results of the RMIT investigation are expected in two weeks.

<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,20867,19108088-23289,00.html>

[Disclaimer](#)

[Email This Article](#)

[**MainPage**](#)

<http://www.rense.com>

[**This Site Served by TheHostPros**](#)