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ITALY

Rome's ecology minister cites papal radio hazard

ROME (Reuters) - An Italian minister yesterday threatened to shut down the pope's radio station in an unprecedented ecological battle between Rome and the Vatican.

Vatican Radio, which has been charged with producing excessive electromagnetic levels, said it was "astonished" by the threat, which would effectively pull the plug on the station that broadcasts Pope John Paul II's words around the world.

But Italian Environmental Minister Willer Bordon gave the papal state two weeks to comply with the toughest laws in Europe on electromagnetic emissions.

"If within 15 days the broadcaster does not get back down under the limits, I will order the national electricity provider to suspend supply to the transmission centers," Mr. Bordon said at a news conference.

"If the supplier continued to provide electricity, it too would be held responsible for committing a crime," he added.

Vatican Radio broadcasts the pope's speeches and events to the world in about 40 languages from a huge forest of antennas north of Rome, an area, where some groups have reported abnormally high levels of cancer.

The transmission center, like Vatican City itself in the center of Rome, is on extraterritorial land and considered part of a sovereign state.

Mr. Bordon said the National Agency for the Protection of the Environment had detected three times Italy's legal limit of electromagnetism during one of Vatican Radio's evening broadcasts.

The Times of India May 14, 2000

<http://timesofindia.com/140500/14hlth12.htm>

ZONING COMMISSION

CASE NO. 01-02TA

EXHIBIT NO. 30

Vatican radio, a health risk

CESANO, Italy: When a routine blood test revealed their 20-month-old daughter Flavia was suffering from leukaemia, Augusto Rossi and Maria Angelone believed fate was to blame.

"Our life became an inferno. We spent so much time in hospital we hardly had enough spare time to breathe," recalled Flavia's mother. "We thought it was one of those tragedies that can happen to anyone," said Flavia's father.

"But when I got to the hospital I met a lot of people with the same disease as Flavia's. A 12-year-old boy died of leukaemia shortly after Flavia was hospitalised. They all lived near my house and near those deadly antennas. I understood there had to be a connection."

The forest of antennae Rossi referred to belong to Vatican radio, which broadcasts in more than 30 languages by medium and short range to 80 million listeners.

The radio station uses one of the most powerful transmission systems in the world via 120-metre-tall directional antennas to reach the most disparate corners of the world. The transmission centre is situated 18 kms north of Rome, less than 2,000 metres away from Flavia's home in Cesano, a northern suburb of Rome. Residents have long complained that Vatican radio programmes interfere with their telephones and intercom system. They say it can even be heard through their washing machines and radiators.

ZONING COMMISSION
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CASE NO.01-02
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After numerous appeals from residents, Rome magistrate Gianfranco Amendola has launched an official investigation into claims that the radio complex may be responsible for electromagnetic pollution. Three Vatican officials are reported to be under investigation.

Although there is no scientific proof that Vatican radio transmissions may be responsible for Flavia's illness, a growing volume of research is heightening concern that electromagnetic pollution may be negatively impacting the health and well being of millions.

A separate inquiry by the Lazio region found that electromagnetic energy near Flavia's house was almost three times the legal limit. An epidemiological study found a "higher death rate from leukaemia for men living within four kms of the Vatican radio station."

Carlo Santi, a local doctor, investigated 7,500 deaths over six years in the Cesano area and found the incidence of tumours was 30 per cent higher than the national average.

In a recent interview to the Rome-based Il Messaggero newspaper, Vatican radio director general Pasquale Borgomeo, a priest, dismissed the residents' claims as "an artificially induced psychosis." Father Borgomeo's interview produced furious reactions among local residents.

"Instead of acting as the defender of poor people, the Vatican is behaving like a multinational intent on defending its own interests," his wife added.

With appeals to politicians having so far failed, residents are now discussing with lawyers how best to take the Vatican to court.

In the meantime, they have announced they will boycott voluntary contributions to the Holy See and have appealed directly to Pope John Paul II.

(DPA)