

FDA Daily Clipping Service
Thursday, August 13, 1981

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SCIENCE 81 SEPTEMBER

Microwaves: tough standards in China

HUNTINGDON, Pa. — The Chinese government reportedly plans to adopt a microwave exposure limit for workers that is 200 times tougher than that for American workers. Ironically, the standard is based in part on U.S. research results.

The report comes from Allan Frey, who recently lectured in China on the health effects of microwaves. Frey is a biologist at Randomline, Inc., a research laboratory in Pennsylvania.

Animal experiments suggest that microwaves can alter behavior and affect information-carrying chemicals in the brain. Relating these findings to humans on the job is difficult, however, and has resulted in widely varying safety limits.

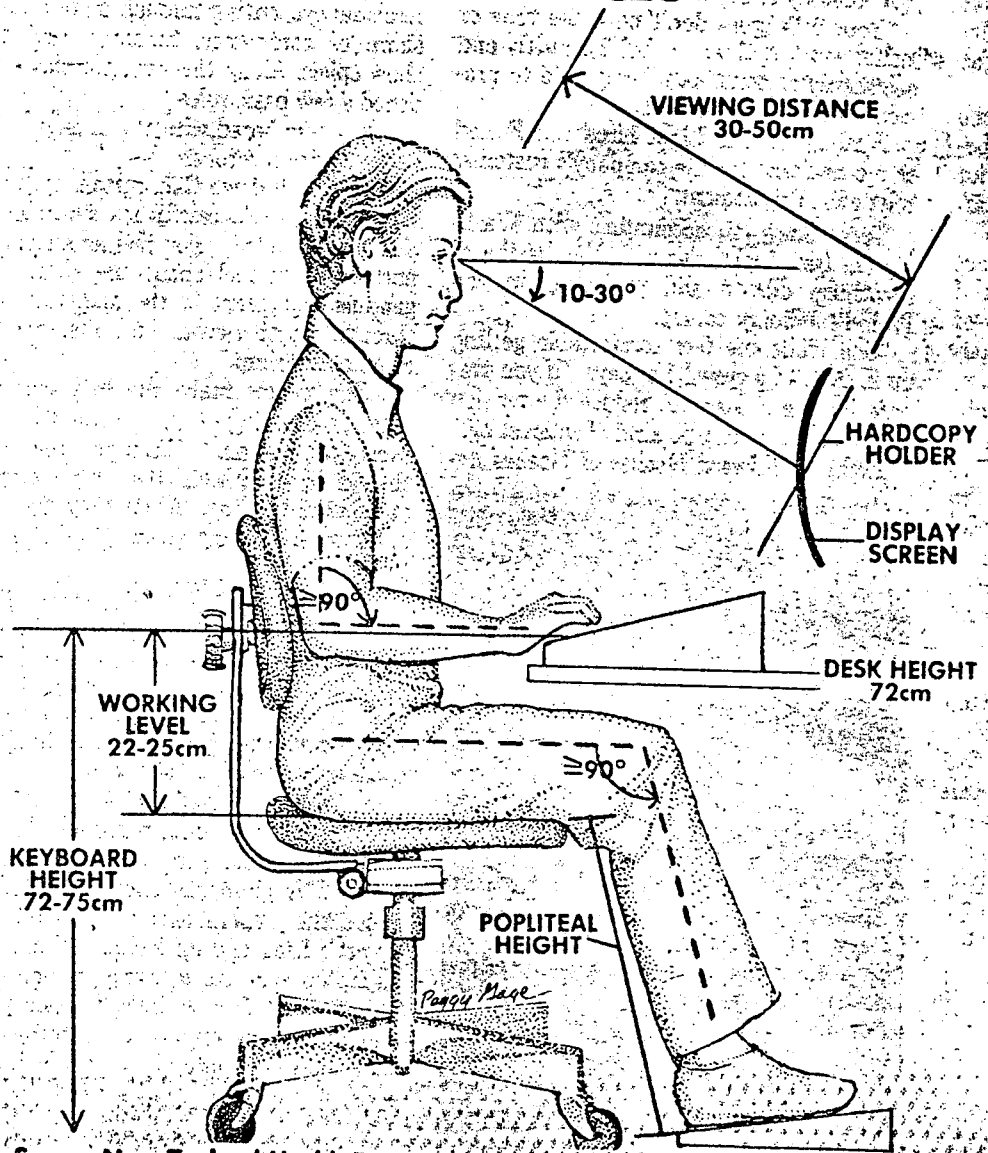
According to Frey, the Chinese standard would limit a laborer to an average exposure of no more than 50 microwatts per square centimeter in a six-hour day. By comparison, the federal guideline for American workers is 10,000 microwatts. U.S. consumers using microwave ovens may be exposed to 1,000 microwatts a few inches from the oven door. Both Americans and Chinese use microwaves in communications and for rapid heating of industrial materials.

SEPTEMBER, 1981 BETTER LIVING

Best Cellars

"Going underground" is taking on a new wrinkle this days. Several thousand people, mainly the elderly, are visiting old uranium mines in Montana to soak up a few residual rays in hopes of healing their arthritis and rheumatism. The self-proclaimed "Health Mines"—with names like "Sunshine," "The Merry Widow" and "Free Enterprise"—charge three dollars for an hour and 25 minutes in the dank tunnels. While waiting for the low-level radiation from the radon gas to work its wonders, visitors can read magazines, play cards or chat. The Federal Trade Commission has doubts about the mines' healing powers, and requires that mine-owners advise potential patrons that their effects on any disease can't be proved—a decision the owners call the pits.

OPTIMUM POSTURAL ANGLES AND DISTANCES



Source: New Zealand Health Department.

By Peggy Gage for The Washington Post