Close enough: A telco tower on a hill near a residential area in SS2, PJ.

Radiation a cause for concern

SS3 residents worried as telco transmitters continue to mushroom

RESIDENTS of SS3, Petaling Jaya, are concerned over the mushrooming of telecommunication (telco) towers on the roofs of shophouses in the neighbourhood. A recent visit by *StarMetro* to the area showed that more than 20 such towers had been built.

However, checks revealed that it was not illegal to build the towers, provided that the guidelines set by the Housing and Local Government Ministry were followed.

According to the guidelines, towers below 45m in height have to be located at least 20m away from residential properties. For commercial and industrial properties, the distance was 10m and 5m, respectively.

If the towers are taller than 45m, the distances are 30m, 15m and 5m for residential, commercial and industrial properties, respectively.

However, these guidelines are meant to prevent untoward incidents involving falling objects and are not because of radio wave emissions from the towers.

In SS3, the residents are worried that the many towers pose a health risk and they question the need for so many transmitters.

"I do not understand why there are so many towers when there are only a handful of telcos," a resident who only wished to be known as Chow said.

Chow, 51, added that he was not sure whether the emissions from the towers could cause ill health but their presence was enough to scare him and his neighbours.

He added that such towers should have been place on highrise buildings instead.

Irene Soo, 26, was also amazed by the mushrooming of the towers. Soo

Checking it out: MCMC engineers testing the emission level in the field.

regularly visits her grandmother in SS3 and said that, initially, there had only been a few towers.

Meanwhile, environmental planning consultant Pratap Chandran Gopinanth felt that the local authorities and the government should have allocated space for such towers, especially in new housing areas.

"In some foreign countries, utility zones are created to house such towers and these zones are usually away from the city and residential areas," Pratap said.

In the Klang Valley, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) handles complaints like this and would usually conduct radiation checks using the Environmental Electromagnetic Fields (EMF) Measurement System Rohde and Schwarz from Germany.

The system measures common radio services, Bluetooth, Global System for Mobile communications (GSM), Universal Mobile Telecommunications System (UMTS), Wireless Local Area Network (WLAN) and television broadcast signals to find out the magnitude of the high frequency emissions.

Each test takes about an hour and the measurements are obtained automatically.

However, MCMC central region assistant director Faisal Hamdi Mohammed Ghouth said that many residents doubted the results, even when shown that the emissions were within acceptable limits.

"They question the effectiveness of our equipment," Faisal said.

He said the complaints received ranged from those who could not get service to fears of radiation emissions from the towers.

MCMC conducts radiation checks upon request but does not issue permits or approve locations for the towers. According to Faisal, the local authorities have the power to do so.

He added that when called in to check on a tower, the MCMC would find out its status from the councils. He said that if the tower was an illegal one, the commission would not carry out a test, instead it would be up to the council to demolish the tower.

Faisal said the MCMC was more than willing to conduct radiation tests and educate the public on the emissions when requested.