

Standing Committee Report Summary

Norms for the setting up of telecom towers

- The Standing Committee on Information Technology (Chairman: Mr. Rao Inderjit Singh) presented its 53rd report on the norms for the setting up of telecom towers, their harmful effects and setting up of security standards on February 12, 2014.
- The Committee was concerned that in absence of any regulatory framework, telecom towers have proliferated across the country in a haphazard manner, especially in the urban areas.
- The Committee observed that due to the lack of a uniform national policy, different local authorities or state governments have adopted their own criteria to grant permission for installation of telecom towers.
- The Committee also noted that the current system does not provide any say to the public when a tower is installed in their vicinity.
- The Committee recommended that the issue of jurisdiction of Department of Telecommunications (DoT) vs. local authorities or state governments regarding setting up of telecom towers be re-examined in-depth by the central government and a national policy be evolved.
- The Committee pointed out that DoT's guidelines on grant of clearances for the installation of telecom towers were only advisory in nature. DoT should have also studied best practices in developed countries before formulating these guidelines.
- The Committee noted that the guidelines do not address the issue of removal of illegal telecom towers, nor are they binding on existing towers.
- The Committee was concerned to note that safety aspects of telecom towers have been given scant attention both by the central and state governments. It suggested that to deter a breach of the safety norms, stringent penalties be imposed.
- The Committee felt that tower sharing can help in restricting the number of towers required, reducing service costs and expanding telecom coverage.
- Considering the seriousness of health concerns raised by some stakeholders regarding radiations from telecom towers, the Committee recommended that the government conduct a scientific study on the issue through a reputed government organisation. It also suggested more stringent radiation norms for areas like schools, hospitals, playgrounds etc.
- The Committee censured the telecom operators, local bodies and DoT for their failure to involve the general public in the setting up of telecom towers. It recommended that the government frame a comprehensive policy on setting up of telecom towers in densely populated, urban residential areas. It also asked DoT to explore the option of utilising low power radiating technologies in urban areas.
- Emphasising the need for continuous monitoring of radiation patterns from telecom towers, the Committee asked DoT to work towards the development of a centralised monitoring system. It also suggested that DoT finalise and implement the safety standards for mobile handsets at the earliest.
- The Committee felt that DoT's existing grievance redressal mechanism for the general public (currently operational only in Mumbai) is inadequate and urgent efforts are needed to extend the system to other cities. It strongly recommended the formation of state and district level telecom committees to effectively address public grievances.
- The Committee was concerned that despite the security risk posed by imported telecom equipment, DoT has not conducted any study on this subject. It recommended that DoT take the necessary steps for the establishment of a telecom testing and security certification centre in the country at the earliest.

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