

U.S. Says Russia Has Eased Microwave Attack on Embassy

Washington

The United States said yesterday that the Soviet Union has sharply reduced the level of microwave radiation beamed at the American embassy in Moscow in recent months.

But in its first detailed public account of the situation, the State Department nonetheless rebuked the Russians for continuing the radio waves even at the current low level.

It said that this showed "a lack of concern for the living and working conditions of our people in Moscow."

Robert Funseth, the department spokesman, told a news conference that as the result of official discussions about the microwaves, "the strength of the signal beamed to the embassy in Moscow has been greatly reduced from previous recordings which were themselves well below established U.S. safety standards."

According to Funseth, the level

of microwave radiation aimed at the embassy is currently less than two microwatts per square centimeter. The installation of aluminum screens outside the embassy earlier this year has further cut the level to less than one microwatt, he said.

The New York Times reported on May 2 that the level late last year had gone as high as 18 microwatts per square centimeter.

American industrial safety standards, Funseth said, permit as many as 10,000 microwatts per square centimeter. But the Soviet Union's much stricter standards permit a level of only ten microwatts per square centimeter.

Funseth, while providing technical details, declined to comment on why the Russians were using the rays, a practice that officials have said began about 16 years ago.

But Soviet officials have justified the microwave beams as necessary to curtail American electronic listening devices on the roof or upper floors of the embassy build-

ing situated in downtown Moscow.

American officials have privately conceded that these devices exist to monitor Soviet radio and telephone transmissions. They have also said that they were impaired by the Soviet jamming waves.

What has irritated American officials was that the Soviet embassy in Washington also carries out similar interceptions of radio and phone conversations but has not been subject to the microwave countermeasures because of concern for Americans working in the same area.

The microwave radiation at the embassy in Moscow was a carefully guarded secret until last February when Ambassador Walter Stoessel briefed his staff on the situation. News of the briefing was leaked to the press.

Officials have stressed throughout that there was as yet no evidence that the microwaves had been responsible for any illnesses.

Microwaves are unlike X-rays

and are not ionized. X-rays in excessive amounts can cause cancer, but no connection has been made between microwaves and cancer.

New York Times