

# Lesson 22: Electromagnetic Radiation

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**Electromagnetic radiation** is a way that energy can be transferred.

- It is special in that it is made up of alternating, perpendicular electric and magnetic fields.
- These alternating fields essentially act as transverse waves traveling outwards from their source.
  - That's where the “radiation” part comes from... they *radiate* outwards in all directions.

**EMR** (as **electromagnetic radiation** is often referred to) travels at an incredibly high velocity of  $3.00 \times 10^8$  m/s.

- The form of EMR that most people easily recognize is visible light, so we often refer to this velocity simply as the speed of light.
- Always remember that this velocity refers to *all* forms of EMR, not just visible light.
- You can always use the universal wave equation to do calculations involving EMR...

$$v = f \lambda$$

- But since the speed of light is always  $c = 3.00 \times 10^8$  m/s, we usually re-write it as...

$$c = f \lambda$$

## Did You Know?

You've already seen the symbol for the speed of light... everyone has! It's in the most famous physics formula of all time:  $E = mc^2$

Although all EMR has the same velocity, the different kinds all have their own distinct **sources**, **frequencies**, and **wavelengths**.

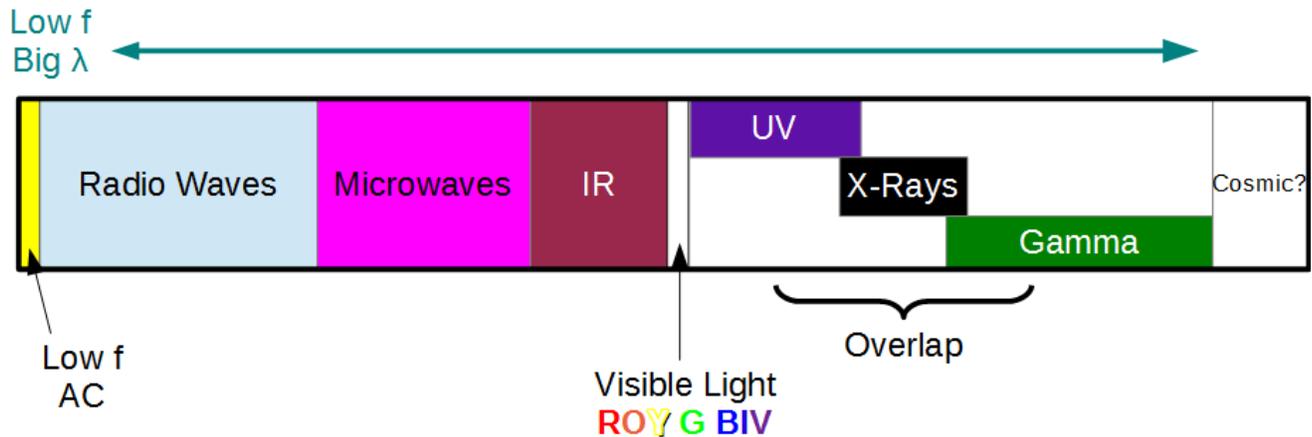
- The different sources all involve **accelerating charges** of some sort, which is the cause of the electric and magnetic fields.
  - The EMR can be detected either...
    - **Directly**, if it travels directly from the source to the observer.
      - e.g. looking at a fire.
    - **Indirectly**, *reflected* from a surface or *transmitted* through a substance.
      - e.g. visible light from a lamp is *reflected* off a page of a book to your eyes.
      - e.g. sunlight is *transmitted* through a window,

## EMR Spectrum

When we start to look at EMR, we often look at it as a **spectrum**.

- You are already used to looking at the spectrum of visible light, probably by remembering the order of the colors of the rainbow using ROY G BIV.
- Visible light is actually a very small part of the entire EMR spectrum.

The EMR spectrum starts with very low frequencies, and goes up to higher and higher frequencies.



## Low Frequency AC

**Created by:** alternating current (AC) running through modern electrical devices.

- This results in random static.
- Reason for warning labels on electronics.
  - The government has regulations about how strong the interference of any one electronic device can be.

**Example frequency:** 60Hz (the low frequency from a wall outlet)

Studied by Hertz based on Maxwell's theories (Lesson 24).

- Very weak and does not transfer much energy.
- This was the first form of EMR that was created artificially, detected, and studied by Heinrich Hertz based on the work of James Clerk Maxwell (Lesson 24).

## Radio Waves

**Created by:** electrons vibrating in antennas.

**Example frequency:** 630 kHz to 92.5 MHz

Radio waves are NOT just AM and FM radio.

- Used by cell phones, cordless phones, TV signals, etc.
- Government regulations make sure that signals from different devices don't conflict.

On some radios you might notice that AM stations are shown as kHz, and FM stations as MHz. So a station like 630 CHED is 630 kHz = 630e3 Hz.

## Microwaves

**Created by:** vibrating electrons in special tubes.

Microwave ovens match the natural resonant frequency of water (**Example frequency:** 2.4 GHz).

Also used to send signals over short distances without losing quality.

- Can be carefully “aimed” at their destination.

They're called "*microwaves*" because as we've been working our way up to higher frequencies the wavelength has been going down.

- We're actually going to deal with wavelengths much smaller than this as we continue, but this is the name that was given to these waves.

## **Infrared Radiation**

**Created by:** electrons in the outer part of atoms making jumps along energy levels.

**Example wavelength:** over 700 nm

If you feel heat from the sun you're feeling IR (infrared) radiation.

Devices like IR goggles see objects by detecting the IR given off.

IR also used in devices like remote controls.

## **Visible Light**

This is the classic form of light that can be detected by human eyes.

- **Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, and Violet... ROY G BIV.**

**Created by:** electrons make big jumps around energy levels in atoms.

**Example wavelengths:**

- Red is low frequency, big wavelength ( $\lambda = 700\text{nm}$ )
- Green in the middle ( $\lambda = 500\text{nm}$ )
- Violet at high frequency, small wavelength ( $\lambda = 350\text{nm}$ )

## **Ultraviolet Radiation**

**Created by:** electrons make even bigger jumps through energy levels.

**Example wavelengths:** less than 350 nm

UV causes tanning in human skin.

- Labels on suntan lotions refer to UVA, UVB, and UVC, the specific frequencies of UV that can have increasingly stronger effects on human tissue.
- The protection the lotion offers is against premature aging or even skin cancer.

You actually need some UV radiation to allow your body to make vitamin D.

- Babies born in the winter are given vitamin D drops to make sure that they are able to grow and develop normally during the shorter days.

## **X-Rays**

**Created by:** shooting electrons at very high speeds at metal plates.

**Example wavelengths:** 10 nm down to 0.01 nm

X rays are able to pass through less dense materials (like flesh), but can't easily get through dense material (like bones and teeth).

- The x ray machines your doctor uses usually involve shooting electrons at very high speeds at metal plates.

X rays are safe in low doses, but prolonged exposure over a long time can damage cells.

- This is why a dentist steps out of the room when he takes an x-ray, otherwise he'd be exposed to x-rays hundreds of times a day for many years.
- It is also why airline pilots and flight attendants need to take a break from flying every so often.
  - When you're in a plane with less atmosphere above you, you are exposed to x-rays from space.

## **Gamma Rays**

**Created by:** radioactive decay of unstable nuclei.

**Example wavelengths:** *varies*

This is the dangerous “radiation” you always hear about when talking about nuclear reactors and bombs.

- It is also used as radiation therapy for some types of cancer.

## **Cosmic Rays**

**Created by:** Super high energy particles (mostly  $p^+$ ,  $\alpha^{2+}$ , and some  $e^-$ ) traveling through space at super high speeds hit Earth's atmosphere.

**Example wavelengths:** *varies*

These are the highest frequency, highest energy EMR waves on the EM spectrum.

- They are created when super high energy particles (mostly protons, alpha particles, and some electrons) traveling through space at super high speeds hit Earth's atmosphere.
- In high doses it can be very dangerous to living things, but the common low doses that naturally happen are not dangerous since the EMR can easily pass through matter.
- Of all the EMR types, cosmic rays are the least understood.
  - This is because the energies of the particles hitting the upper atmosphere are sometimes as high as  $10^{20}$  eV. In comparison, even the Large Hadron Collider only gets particles up to about  $10^{12}$  eV.