

WiFi – Panorama Programme 21 May 2007

The Panorama programme about WiFi broadcast on Monday 21 May raised a number of issues about the installation and use of WiFi systems in schools and by children. This note is intended to provide some background information and guidance to DCSs in respect of this issue.

Summary

There is no evidence to date that exposure to the radio frequency (RF) signals from WiFi and WLANs adversely affect the health of the general population. In addition, HPA advice is:

- The signals from WiFi are very low power, typically 0.1 watt (100 milliwatts) in both the computer and the mast (or router) and resulting exposures should be well within internationally accepted guidelines.
- The frequencies used are broadly the same as those from 'traditional' RF applications.
- Based on current knowledge, RF exposures from WiFi are likely to be lower than those from mobile phones.

On the basis of current scientific information WiFi equipment satisfies international guidelines. There is no consistent evidence of health effects from RF exposures below guideline levels and therefore no reason why schools and others should not use WiFi equipment .

Background Information

WiFi is short for Wireless Fidelity and is a particular type of wireless local area network (WLAN) – i.e., you don't need to plug your computer into a phone network via a cable. There are many types of WLAN but all of them allow two or more computers to form a network using radio frequency (RF) signals. They allow users to access and share data, applications, internet access or other network resources in the same way as wired (cable) systems.

The key reference agencies in this matter are Becta and the Health Protection Agency.

Becta's position is as follows –

“Following Monday night's (21 May 2007) Panorama programme, Becta has been in contact with the Health Protection Agency (HPA) - the government agency responsible for health and safety - to obtain the latest guidance on any health issues relating to wireless technology.

The Association of Directors of Children's Services

Despite the claims made in Monday night's programme, the HPA's guidance remains the same. The latest advice on their [website](#) reads:

"On the basis of current scientific information WiFi equipment satisfies international guidelines. There is no consistent evidence of health effects from RF exposures below guideline levels and therefore no reason why schools and others should not use WiFi equipment."

Based on this guidance, and expert safety advice, Becta believes that there is no need to change its current guidance: while secure wireless networks can complement an institution's wired network, they should not replace it."

The HPA's website (follow link above)

http://www.hpa.org.uk/radiation/understand/radiation_topics/emf/wifi.htm

provides useful background information and further advice.

The Association of Directors of Children's Services

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