

Schools 'should wait for official report' before installing Wi-Fi

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Schools should think twice about installing Wi-Fi systems while an official investigation into their safety is carried out, teachers' leaders said yesterday.

Philip Parkin, general secretary of the Professional Association of Teachers, said that the investigation – announced late last week by the Health Protection Agency – suggested that there was "no smoke without fire". He added that schools should consider more carefully whether they should introduce them into the classroom.

The **£300,000 investigation** marks something of a victory for *The Independent on Sunday*, which for five months has been calling for one, and will be the first of its kind. The agency says it can find only one peer-reviewed study in the scientific literature on radiation received from Wi-Fi, even though it is now to be found in half of all primary schools and four-fifths of secondary schools in Britain, and is being extended to cover vast areas of cities such as Norwich, Brighton, Manchester and London.

The agency says: "Wi-Fi is becoming increasingly widely used... However, there has not been extensive research into what people's exposures actually are to this new technology and that is why we are initiating this new programme of research and analyses."

It plans to spend at least a year "on a systematic programme of research" measuring radiation emissions from a wide range of Wi-Fi equipment and laptop computers, and calculating the doses received by adults and children using them.

Earlier this year the agency's chairman, Sir William Stewart, called for a "timely review" of the use of Wi-Fi, but critics say that the study seems to fall short of this. It is not going to monitor the effects of the radiation on the health of children in the classroom.

The agency says it will compare the levels it finds with "established international exposure guidelines". Yet these were denounced this summer as "thousands of times too lenient" in the report of a working group of leading scientists and public health experts.

They are only designed to protect against harmful heating or induced electrical currents in the body, and not against diseases such as cancer, which are beginning to emerge from exposure to similar radiation from mobile phones, at very much lower levels.

The city of Frankfurt is so concerned that the technology is already banned from its schools, while the German government advises that people should keep exposure to radiation from

Wi-Fi "as low as possible" by choosing "conventional wired connections, if the use of wireless-supported systems can be avoided".

Mike Bell, chairman of the Radiation Research Trust, said; "It is good news that the agency is carrying out this inquiry, but it needs to widen it so that it assesses the real risks to health."