

Germany warns citizens to avoid using Wi-Fi

Environment Ministry's verdict on the health risks from wireless technology puts the British government to shame. By Geoffrey Lean Published: 09 September 2007

People should avoid using Wi-Fi wherever possible because of the risks it may pose to health, the German government has said.

Its surprise ruling - the most damning made by any government on the fast-growing technology - will shake the industry and British ministers, and vindicates the questions that The Independent on Sunday has been raising over the past four months.

Germany's official radiation protection body also advises its citizens to use landlines instead of mobile phones, and warns of "electrosmog" from a wide range of other everyday products, from baby monitors to electric blankets. [Including cordless phones, many of which broadcast 24 hours a day, even if not used.]

The German government's ruling - which contrasts sharply with the unquestioning promotion of the technology by British officials - was made in response to a series of questions by Green members of the Bundestag, Germany's parliament.

The Environment Ministry recommended that people should keep their exposure to radiation from Wi-Fi "as low as possible" by choosing "conventional wired connections". It added that it is "actively informing people about possibilities for reducing personal exposure".

Its actions will provide vital support for Sir William Stewart, Britain's official health protection watchdog, who has produced two reports calling for caution in using mobile phones and who has also called for a review of the use of Wi-Fi in schools. His warnings have so far been ignored by ministers and even played down by the Health Protection Agency, which he chairs.

By contrast the agency's German equivalent - the Federal Office for Radiation Protection - is leading the calls for caution.

Florian Emrich, for the office, says Wi-Fi should be avoided "because people receive exposures from many sources and because it is a new technology and ...research into its health effects has not yet been carried out".