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Wi-Fi dispute continues to raise concerns

By *Kristy Kirkup*, *Parliamentary Bureau*

OTTAWA - A top American researcher has sharply criticized Health Canada for ruling out the potential human health risks linked to radiation from wireless Internet signals.

Dr. David Carpenter, a renowned scientist who studies the impact of environmental contaminants, says Health Canada is acting irresponsibly as a government agency.

"It is disgusting," said Carpenter. "We have absolutely no evidence it is safe."

Canada's federal health agency maintains Wi-Fi is safe.

"We don't know the long-term effects of Wi-Fi," said Health Canada's top radiation researcher Beth Pieteron. "From all evidence we have today, there is no evidence based on international experts telling us that there is a cause for concern from exposure to Wi-Fi."

Some members of the world's scientific community say there is no way to know wireless Internet will not have an impact down the road.

Health Canada and the World Health Organization also seem to have a different understanding of a new radio frequency classification.

Wireless Internet -- Wi-Fi -- may be carcinogenic according to the World Health Organization but Health Canada says the specialized United Nations agency didn't make this finding.

The WHO's International Agency for Research on Cancer reclassified radio frequency emitted by "wireless devices" as a possible carcinogenic to humans in May. The study was based on a cell phone use but the IARC committee chair confirms the research can be applied to wireless Internet.

"The classification covers radio frequency electromagnetic radiation, which would include wireless," said Dr. Johnathan Samet said in an e-mail.

Health Canada says the classification doesn't include wireless.

"The studies that made the conclusion to go to the 2B possible classification were all with heavy cell phone users that use cell phones against their head and the strength of radio frequency in that situation is many, many times higher than anybody is exposed to from Wi-Fi or any of the other wireless technologies," said Pieteron. "You cannot make that direct link at all. Certainly in IARC's announcements, they didn't make that link at all either."

Canada's federal health agency claims it supports decisions made by the committee.

"Canada certainly supports WHO recommendations and the findings of IARC," Pieteron said.

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