

05/02/2015 - Wifi banned from nurseries in France

Powerwatch News

In an unprecedented move, France have passed a law regarding children's exposure to wireless devices by entirely banning WiFi in nursery / daycare settings, and restricted in primary schools to only be enabled when actively being used for pupil education.

Not only does this demonstrate an awareness and proactive approach to mitigate potential harm from radiofrequency electromagnetic fields, it also demonstrates the first national implementation of the precautionary principle with regard to managing the prevalence of wireless technology.

Long-term researcher Dr Dariusz Leszczynski recently [covered this issue](#) and Finland's official reaction appears to be one of ambivalence: "we've already told people to limit their exposure in 2009, so we've done our bit" despite the use of wireless gadgets becoming obligatory in primary and nursery schools in the country. It's clear that without a legislative approach, people will not voluntarily choose to limit their exposure even if you explain that there might be reasons for them to do so.

Key points from the bill

- Wireless access points / routers to be banned from nurseries and daycare centres
- Wireless access points / routers must be disabled in primary schools when not in active use for lessons
- Any advertisement for mobile telephony must include a recommendation of devices (such as earphones) to reduce exposure to the head
- All public places offering WiFi must clearly advertise the fact on a sign at the entrance to the property
- All wireless devices must contain clear instructions on how to disable their wireless functionality

Contents of the new law taken from French national coverage

Translation mainly courtesy of Google and André Fauteux

Two years in the works, the law governing public exposure to electromagnetic fields generated by wireless technology (base stations, mobile phones, WiFi, tablets, etc) was adopted by the Members of the National Assembly [MNAs] when time was set aside in favour of the Greens on Thursday January 29th 2015. It was voted by the majority, while the UDI Party abstained - except Bertrand Pancher (Meuse) who voted in favor - and the UMP voted against it, seeing it as a barrier to the development of wireless digital industries.

This law - the first in France to establish a precautionary approach addressing the potential health risks of radio frequencies - is the result of a real obstacle course, during which its initial ambitions were seriously downgraded. The Bill, originally filed in January 2013 by the MNA for Val-de-Marne Laurence Abeille (Europe Ecology-Greens) had been referred to committee by the Socialists, before returning to the National Assembly in January 2014 in a watered-down form and was then accepted at first reading by the Senate in June 2014 which started the formal adoption process.

Despite successive setbacks, the environmental group decided to submit the Bill to a vote "as is" to prevent its return to the Senate where it would have suffered new delays and probably additional knife strokes. Its adoption is thus final and is welcomed by Mrs Abeille, "the application decrees will be able to be acted on without further delay". It still needs to President of France's signature to bring it into force.

Not lowering the limits

Finally, the "Law on sobriety, transparency, information and consultation for exposure to electromagnetic waves" appears as a compromise between the supporters of a stricter supervision of the sector and wireless phone operators, opposed to any regulatory obstacle. "This present text does not fully address all the issues", recognizes the Green MNA. "However, it is an essential first step."

The major novelty is the introduction into French law of a principle of "sobriety" of public exposure to electromagnetic fields. This principle, however, remains vague and non-binding. It is thus no longer a question of lowering the exposure limits in force which, depending on the frequencies involved are between 41 and 61 volts per meter (V/m), while the original Bill was aimed to scale them back to "as low as reasonably possible" or 0.6 V/m.

Hot spots

The National Frequency Agency (AFNR) will carry out an annual national census of "atypical points" or "places where the level of public exposure substantially exceeds that generally observed at the national scale". Operators will have to remedy them within six months, "subject to technical feasibility".

The average exposure in France is now about 1 V/m, but a study of the Operations Committee on mobile waves (Copic), covering sixteen municipal representative of the French territory and published in 2013, reported some exposure peaks "up to 10 V/m at maximum transmitter power", even if the levels remained below 0.7 V/m in 90% of cases. The AFNR considers up to now as atypical places where exposure exceeds 6 V/m which is still an unnecessarily high public level.

In matters of transparency, the installation of antennas will now be subject to prior notice to mayors and presidents of municipal bodies. And these may in turn organize a consultation with residents - although this is not a formal requirement. In addition, a campaign of "awareness and information on the responsible and rational use of mobile devices" will be carried out.

WiFi prohibited in nurseries

Section 7 of the Act is devoted to the protection of children. Wireless devices will be banned in "the spaces dedicated to the care, resting and activities of children younger than 3 years old", that is to say, nurseries and daycare centres.

However, contrary to the initial desire of environmentalists, Wi-Fi will remain permitted in primary schools. For new installations (only at present!), it will however have to be disabled outside "digital educational activities". We imagine a big debate and parental pressure on primary schools that already have WiFi to also implement the switching off of WiFi Access Points and other equipment in classrooms when it is not required for a particular lesson.

Finally, the often dire situation of people suffering from electrohypersensitivity receives a first consideration. The government will have to submit a report to Parliament on this issue within a year.

Anti-RF-exposure associations also prefer to consider the glass half-full rather than half-empty. "This act, which is the first dedicated to the issue of electromagnetic waves and their impact on the environment and health, marks a first step in the legal recognition of the need to regulate the development of mobile phone communications and all wireless applications" says the association for the regulation of mobile phone base stations, Priartem. In its view, "this first legislative effort must be an encouragement to go further in protecting people".

Calls for caution

This act arrives in a context of accelerated development of sources of electromagnetic fields, in particular with the deployment of very high-speed 4G mobile communications. As of January 1st 2015, ANFR indicates the number of 4G base station sites authorised in France was, for all operators, 18,699 - compared to 12,525 only a year earlier - and 15,424 are already in service.

If there is no scientific consensus around the potential health risks from radiofrequencies, many studies and opinions have called for caution. In 2011, the World Health Organization (WHO) classified them as "possibly carcinogenic". And in 2013, the National Agency Health Safety of Food, Environment and Labour (ANSES) recommended to "limit exposure of the population to radiofrequencies - especially from mobile phones - and especially for children and heavy users ". It also called for "controlling the overall exposure from base stations".

This news article was published on 05/02/2015 and had some clarifications made on 7th Feb 2015.

Links

- » [Original article](#) in the French online media "Le Monde"
- » [Passed bill](#) in full (including amendments)
- » [Dariusz Leszczynski's comments](#) on the story
- » [USA Library of Congress](#) commentary - note that this avoids all mention of schools and WiFi