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Working together for a safe care and learning environment for children and young people

Open Letter to Rt. Hon. Jeremy Hunt MP

Secretary of State for Health

Richmond House

79 Whitehall

London

SW1A 2NS

Dear Mr Hunt,

Re: Request for a new Commons Select Committee to investigate health aspects of WiFi and wireless technology in schools, including curriculum use of mobile phones and wireless tablet computers.

As you are aware, from 1 April 2013, responsibility for giving advice on public health aspects of non-ionising radio-frequency radiation transferred from the Health Protection Agency (HPA/CRCE) to Public Health England (PHE). In the last few days of the HPA's existence, SSITA, together with other UK organisations affiliated to IEMFA, (International EMF Alliance), made a formal complaint to the HPA concerning its failure to provide appropriate precautionary advice regarding radiofrequency electromagnetic fields¹. We were told that this complaint would proceed to PHE, and that accountability would transfer to you, as Secretary of State for Health.

We have not yet had an appropriate response to that complaint. We are now formally asking the authorised people within Parliament to set up a Commons Health Select Committee, dedicated to investigating health concerns about wireless technologies in schools, nurseries and children's centres, and to convey crucial evidence, about the adverse health effects of microwave radiation on children, to the Department of Education. Such an inquiry by a Parliamentary body is long overdue, as is responsible action from the Department of Health.

In the past few years, internationally, much research has been published and there have been many calls for precaution to protect children in the face of the proliferation of wireless technologies in schools and child-care

¹ <http://www.ssita.org.uk/SSITA-Complaint-to-Health-Protection-Agency-March-2013/>

environments². Children are especially vulnerable to the effects from RF radiation because they have thinner skulls and bones than adults and so can absorb ten times the amount of radiation, into their bone marrow. It is no longer sufficient to hide behind the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) safety levels (set in 1998), because ICNIRP (a self-appointed body) themselves have never said that WiFi is safe for children in schools and nurseries. They do, however, stress that children are amongst the vulnerable groups of the population for which their levels “*may be inadequate*”.³ The ICNIRP safety levels purely protect against acute heating of tissue or electric shock, and are not designed to provide protection against chronic, low-level exposure which is now well documented as causing biological effects and harm to health⁴. The current ICNIRP levels were voted out of date and obsolete by the European Parliament in 2008⁵. Furthermore, children stand to have a lifetime exposure to wireless radiation which greatly compounds their risks. Even Paolo Vecchia – the former chairman of ICNIRP – said that the ICNIRP RF exposure guidelines were neither “*a mandatory prescription for safety, the last word on the issue, or defensive walls for industry and others.*”⁶

There are several material facts that the UK government has failed to make schools fully aware of:

1. The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (Resolution 1815. Section 8.3.2.) recommended:

Concerning the protection of children:

that schools ...” *for children in general, and particularly in schools and classrooms, give preference to wired Internet connections, and strictly regulate the use of mobile phones by school children on school premises.*”⁷

This advice has been taken up in Bavaria, Germany (2007)^{8 9} and more recently, in April 2013, the French National Assembly voted to follow this advice¹⁰. Other countries who are advising that wired connections should be used in schools are Russia (2012)¹¹ and Salzburg, Austria(2005)¹² and Switzerland¹³. Israel’s Health Minister pushed for similar recommendations in 2012.¹⁴

2. In May 2011 the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), part of The World Health Organisation, classified radio-frequency electromagnetic fields as “*possibly carcinogenic to humans*” (Group 2B)¹⁵. This includes radiation from mobile phones and WiFi. In previous decades asbestos and cigarettes were initially classified as 2B before more evidence eventually led to being elevated to

² <http://www.safeinschool.org/2011/01/international-warnings-on-wi-fi.html> comprehensive list of organisations calling for a precautionary approach

³ <http://www.icnirp.de/documents/philosophy.pdf> page 9, under “People being protected”.

⁴ <http://www.bioinitiative.org/conclusions/>

⁵ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2008-0410+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN> items 21-23

⁶ http://archive.radiationresearch.org/conference/downloads/021145_vecchia.pdf slide 16

⁷ <http://assembly.coe.int/mainf.asp?link=/documents/adoptedtext/ta11/eres1815.htm>

⁸ http://www.icems.eu/docs/deutscher_bundestag.pdf

⁹ http://www.magdahavas.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/German_Swiss_Wifi_In_Schools_Warn.pdf first letter

¹⁰ <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/ta/ta0096.asp>

¹¹ <http://wifiinschools.org.uk/resources/RussCNIRP+WiFi+19-06-12.pdf>

¹² <http://www.antennafreeunion.org/salzburg.pdf>

¹³ http://www.magdahavas.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/German_Swiss_Wifi_In_Schools_Warn.pdf second letter

¹⁴ <http://www.timesofisrael.com/stop-wi-fi-in-schools-deputy-health-minister-implores/>

¹⁵ http://www.iarc.fr/en/media-centre/pr/2011/pdfs/pr208_E.pdf

Group 2A, then Group 1 carcinogens. We could be seeing a similar picture with radio-frequency radiation as we saw for these potent carcinogens, which caused thousands of deaths and public health disaster worldwide while the scientists argued about the validity of the evidence.

3. The Department of Health advises that children under 16 should use mobile phones *“for essential purposes only”*¹⁶. You may have come under pressure from the mobile phone industry to dilute this advice, but this would be difficult to justify in light of the (later) decision of WHO/IARC to give this kind of radiation a Class 2B “possible” carcinogen classification, with the likelihood that further research may raise it to a Class 2A “probable” carcinogen rating in the next few years. Some members of the IARC Committee felt that there was *already* enough evidence to give it the 2A classification in May 2011.
4. The Trades Union Council (TUC) has a policy on 2B Carcinogens (red ink ours):

The TUC document, Occupational Cancer: A Workplace Guide¹⁷, advises that establishments **do not introduce Class 2B Carcinogens**. Page 6 states that *“Caution should be used to prevent exposure to substances in Group 2B.”*

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999¹⁸, and COSHH (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health)¹⁹ means that the first step **must always be to remove the hazard altogether if possible**.

In the case of schools and child-care establishments, it cannot be argued that it has been necessary to introduce this 2B carcinogen into the environment in the first place when wired technology is fully available.

SSITA have had sight of a letter dated 9 April 2013 from you to Hugo Swire MP, in which you responded to his letter of 7 March 2013, regarding one of his constituents who has been communicating concerns with him for some time about WiFi in schools.

You made many points in this letter that we would like to raise in such a Committee. For example:

Your reiteration of the HPA statement on Page 2, Para 4, in your letter to Hugo Swire, that:

“.....the HPA advised, in responding to the AGNIR report, that community and individual measures to reduce exposure are not necessary”

This is not our understanding of what ICNIRP refers to—in two of the references already given here:

¹ <http://www.icnirp.de/documents/philosophy.pdf> page 9, under “People being protected” and

⁶ http://archive.radiationresearch.org/conference/downloads/021145_vecchia.pdf slide 16

If the quoted statement, above in red, is sound, then why was the decision made, on 19 March 2013 by the French National Assembly, to recommend wired internet access in schools to “protect children” and support

¹⁶ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/147418/dh_124899.pdf.pdf

¹⁷ <http://www.tuc.org.uk/workplace/tuc-20601-f0.pdf>

¹⁸ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1999/3242/contents/made>

¹⁹ <http://www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/>

the precautionary principle regarding radiofrequency radiation²⁰? This is the English translation of the actual wording of the school reform bill passed by the French National Assembly on 19 March 2013:

*“This public service [based on educational information technologies] should be implemented in educational institutions using **an infrastructure favoring the use of wired networks**. Indeed the precautionary principle must guide states and provinces to protect children, especially the younger ones, from the influence of microwaves.”*

The French Assembly would not have voted so recently that “*where possible schools should replace WiFi with wired connections*” without evidence to support its potential harmful effects. There are examples earlier in this letter of other countries who are taking a similar precautionary approach after assessing all the scientific evidence available.

On behalf of the children of this country, their parents, and the teachers and carers who serve them, SSITA wishes to know what measures you are taking on this important, safeguarding issue.

Having a Commons Select Committee on the health risks of radiofrequency/microwave radiation from wireless technologies in children’s settings would allow a constructive dialogue to take place between Public Health England and the Department for Education, with input from external bodies and campaign groups who have expertise in this field. It is important that this work is done transparently, without lobbying by the wireless industry going on behind closed doors. Our many members, along with other groups acting in this field, will be writing to their MPs to ask for their support in our demand for a Commons Health Select Committee on WiFi in Schools to be set up.

We look forward to your reply which we plan to publish on our website along with this open letter.

Yours sincerely,

Diana Hanson - For and on behalf of SSITA

Dr Elizabeth Evans MA (Cantab), MBBS (Hons)(Lond), DRCOG – Medical Advisor to SSITA

www.ssita.org.uk

Signatories to the above letter: Please see accompanying page.

²⁰ <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/ta/ta0096.asp> *Bill of direction and guidance for the re-foundation of the Republic's schools, adopted in first reading by the National Assembly 19 March 2013*

The list of signatories to this SSITA letter to Rt. Hon Jeremy Hunt will be augmented in due course.
As of 30 August 2013 the list reads:

Organisations:

WiredChild

CAVI Society

EM Radiation Research Trust

Electrosensitivity.uk (ES-UK)

Eteachers (see Electrosensitivity in Teachers and School Personnel/Electrosensitivity in Children.

Interconnections

Mast Sanity

Bio-Electromagnetic Research Initiative

'Against RFID in Schools'- (www.rfidinschools.com)

Individual signatories:

Dr Andrew Goldsworthy, Lecturer in Biology (retired) Imperial College London.

Dr Catarina Geoghan, BSc (Hons), PhD (Sussex), BEMRI

Adrian Gray, BSc (Hons) Physics, Trustee, Mast Sanity

Dr Zac Cox BDS

Pascale Gravell, Editor, Families Magazine Ltd.

Robert F Howie, BEd (Hons), Class Teacher

Andrew Hughes, Support Worker for people with learning disabilities

Julia Taylor Nutritionist MBANT Dip ION

Ingrid Dickenson BRCP EMR

Linda Gerrard GRNCM (Teacher)

Peter Limbrick, Interconnections

Martina Jirankova-Limbrick

Margaret White BSc (Hons); MA; MBPsS

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