



Council on Wireless Technology Impacts

Citizens and professionals concerned about responsible use of electromagnetic radiation
936-B Seventh Street, #206, Novato, California 94945

<http://www.energyfields.org/>

For Immediate Release

January 15, 2007

Contact: Rebekah Azen

505-424-9475

rebekah@cybermesa.com

LIBRARY DIRECTOR RESIGNS BECAUSE OF WIFI

A Library Director at a college in Santa Fe, NM left her position due to wireless internet (WiFi) in the library. Rebekah Zablud Azen, MLIS, resigned from her position at Quimby Memorial Library, Southwestern College, on December 16th, 2006 after administrators refused to discuss the issue.

“I don’t feel that I should have to jeopardize my health to secure or maintain employment, but allowing oneself to be irradiated is fast becoming a condition of employment for librarians. I just said no.”

B. Blake Levitt, a medical journalist who has been researching the biological affects of nonionizing radiation since the late ‘70’s, and author of: *Electromagnetic Fields: A Consumer’s Guide to the Issues and How to Protect Ourselves*, and *Cell Towers: Wireless Convenience? or Environmental Hazard?* wrote, **“Once considered safe environments/professions, librarians and teachers are now in high risk professions.”**

Azen is not the first librarian to express opposition or leave her position because of WiFi. In Santa Fe, four librarians recently signed a petition against WiFi in the public libraries, while several others objected to WiFi but were afraid to speak out. There is a librarian on the west coast that has been told not to discuss this issue by library administration and a report of two librarians who moved to rural towns and left the profession.

The proliferation of wireless technologies is a growing and serious public health hazard, says Azen. “There is no evidence proving safety and an abundance of evidence demonstrating biological harm to living systems. Anyone who cares to look into the vast body of research that has been conducted over the past 80 years will find that the weight of evidence points to harm. The only sensible response is precaution.”

Current safety standards adopted by federal agencies like OSHA were developed by industry groups and are obsolete. EPA senior scientist and radiofrequency (RF) radiation expert, Norbert Hankin, wrote, **“Both the NCRP (National Council on Radiation Protection) and ANSI/IEEE standards are thermally based and do not apply to chronic non-thermal exposure situations.”** In other words, if it doesn’t “cook tissue,” it is assumed to be safe. Research indicates however that low-power exposure (WiFi is “low power”) has been shown to have numerous biological effects which can lead to serious health consequences, including neurological, cardiological and hormonal disorders, breakdown of the blood-brain barrier, DNA damage, cancers, diabetes and asthma. Children, to whom public libraries cater, have brains and nervous systems that are still developing; they are particularly vulnerable.

Among the many scientists, organizations, government agencies and medical societies issuing bans or precautions, Lakehead University, in Canada, prohibits WiFi on its campus; the Public Health Department in Salzburg, Austria advises against WiFi in schools; the Schools Department in Frankfurt, Germany prohibits WiFi in schools; and the Austrian Medical Association warns against wireless technologies, including WiFi. The Benevento Resolution is the most recent and comprehensive pronouncement by 31 scientists internationally.

The Benevento Resolution http://www.icems.eu/docs/Benevento_press_release.pdf states, **“Based on our review of the science, biological effects can occur from exposures to both Extremely Low Frequency Electromagnetic Fields (ELF EMF) and Radiofrequency fields (RF EMF). More evidence has accumulated that there are adverse health effects from occupational and**

public exposure to electric, magnetic and electromagnetic fields, or EMF at current exposure levels.” The resolution also specifically warns against exposure to WiFi systems.

Azen is also opposed to WiFi in libraries because it creates barriers to access for people with disabilities. People with certain types of heart disease, epilepsy, and others with electromagnetic sensitivity react with pain, confusion, and neurological or cardiac symptoms and are effectively denied access to libraries with WiFi. In California alone, a 1998 survey by the California Dept. of Health Services found that 120,000 Californians were unable to work due to electromagnetic radiation. Today, this number is undoubtedly much higher due to the rapid growth of wireless technologies.

Librarians have always upheld the principle that access to libraries and information is inviolate, says Azen. “Today, this important library principle is eroding due the unquestioned acceptance of WiFi. Libraries should retain their autonomy as “wireless-free” zones. Instead of rushing to join the herd to go wireless, libraries should be building collections on this topic and educating the populace about the hazards associated with this technology.”

Azen says there are other issues as well with WiFi in libraries: libraries are relinquishing their unique role by morphing into internet cafés, the provision of special services to those who have the money to afford laptops is re-igniting the digital divide, WiFi service imposes a financial and personnel drain on libraries already struggling to build collections and maintain traditional library services, and unsecured networks compromise a library’s commitment to protect user privacy and confidentiality. “Social security numbers, financial records, and yes, library records, are all vulnerable in unsecured wireless networks.”

Azen says that librarians need to assess technological trends wisely and ensure that the adoption of new technologies does not adversely impact public health, restrict access, undermine the treasured principles upon which we stand, or erode libraries. She says there are simple solutions to providing more computer access, such as installing wired hubs for patrons.

WiFi is the proverbial elephant in the room. We must, as a profession, begin to open up a dialog on this critical issue that is affecting libraries and librarians everywhere, says Azen.