

## Council debates potential health effects of Wi-Fi

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Anca Gaston and Thorold resident Stephanie Soccio worry about what potential health effects could be in store for residents of the city should its council continue with a pilot project to test a wireless broadband network in Confederation Heights.

An employee of Brock University who also objected to the project becomes physically ill in the presence of Wi-Fi. Gaston encouraged members of council to scrap the project or move transmitters to into industrial areas, limiting residents' exposure to what Gaston said is the potentially harmful radiation being emitted.

The advent of technology over the last half of the 20th century, including the increasing usage of televisions, cellular phones and wireless Internet, has created an "electromagnetic revolution," said Gaston.

The St. Catharines resident recommended minimizing exposure. "It's a frivolous use of technology. Cable Internet is fine and would work for many more years."

Although many studies have not drawn conclusions regarding the health risks associated with Wi-Fi technology, she spoke about those examining potential dangers associated with radiation coming from other communication transmitters, such as cellphone towers.

Science is showing human exposure to Wi-Fi technology can have long-term biological effects, said Gaston, adding that being exposed to the transmitters in Confederation Heights "24 hours a day, seven days a week" puts a strain on people with electrohypersensitivity, a condition that's the result of exposure to the radiation. Symptoms range from irritability and poor sleep to cognitive dysfunction, vertigo and depression, said Gaston, who also pointed out some studies link the radiation to cancer.

"The presence of Wi-Fi will worsen the symptoms of people with sensitivities (to radiation) in the community," she said.

In response to her argument, city councillor Tim Whalen requested ReliaClear Canada, Inc., the company who installed the technology in the Thorold neighbourhood, reply to Gaston's concern. In addition, he repeated a request for a project status report from the company, including subscription rates and customer satisfaction.

His request resulted in a two-hour debate on the issue and highlighted the divide among councillors who voted for or against moving ahead with the project in March. It passed by a narrow margin.

Wi-Fi technology has been used in other communities, and from discussions with ReliaClear, councillor Shawn Wilson said he was told there were no ill health effects. He added he would be "hard-pressed" to ask ReliaClear to remove their equipment without conclusive proof to the contrary. "I find it ludicrous the presenters are using scare tactics and research from studies that who knows where they were conducted. I can find studies saying it's not (harmful). Lets compare apples to apples. I don't make legal decisions...and don't take a presentation as gospel. It's a ridiculous request and I won't support the motion."

Gaston replied by comparing the issue of health effects with those of smoking. Health Canada's information from 1999 is years behind the technology, Likewise, it took time for the warnings of health officials to result in regulations regarding smoking, she said.

"In order to prove its harmful, people have to get sick and die from it," she responded.

This brought comment from councillor Nancy Rogers, who said her husband had been a smoker and succumbed to leukemia and there likely hadn't been studies indicating the health risks of his habit.

She said more information was needed from both sides and the lack of conclusive studies shouldn't stop council from taking action – Thorold was one of the first cities to ban pesticide use despite being presented with studies showing no ill health effects.

"Limited exposure – that's what it's all about. I'm not suggesting we pull out the technology, (but) we're being presented something by well-educated people."

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