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Ontario school cuts Wi-Fi over safety concerns



A private school in Ontario has cut its wireless Internet network over concerns that the technology causes health issues in students.

Pretty River Academy in Collingwood, Ont., a private school with 150 students attending kindergarten to Grade 12, is the first Ontario school to remove Wi-Fi from campus.

The school's old Wi-Fi system was taken out over the summer and replaced with Ethernet connections ahead of the first day of the school year.

In May the World Health Organization said radio frequency radiation from WiFi and cell phones posed a similar health threat to DDT, lead and car exhaust.

Principal Roberta Murray-Hirst says the new hard-wired Internet system is actually faster than their previous system and gives teachers control over when students can go online.

Murray-Hirst said they did not receive any complaints from students or parents about health concerns but decided to take the precaution anyway.

"We like to be proactive and obviously safety is always a concern," she said.

The debate over wireless Internet in Ontario schools grew heated last summer when a group of elementary school teachers attempted to have the technology banned from classrooms in the Niagara region.

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario voted in 2010 to keep wireless Internet. In August, the group voted to establish a committee for studying Wi-Fi in classrooms.

A group called the Safe Schools Committee has also continued to push for a ban.

They claim exposure to wireless Internet causes headaches, insomnia and rashes in students – afflictions that seem to subside on weekends and vacations, only to return when the kids go back to school.

Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health said wireless Internet posed no threat to children at schools.