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**THE INDEPENDENT**

## Leading article: Hi-tech horrors

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The technologies we grow to love most have a way of exacting a toll once we become dependent on them. They change our lives and then come back to demand their price. Take the internal combustion engine, which has allowed us to be comfortably mobile, but killed many millions in accidents and from pollution. Or indeed the burning of fossil fuels, which has driven prosperity for more than two centuries, but now threatens to destroy through uncontrolled global warming the very civilisation it has created. Mobile phones are our latest love affair - over 50 million are in use in Britain - and for these too there may well be a reckoning. Evidence is beginning to accumulate that the radiation they emit may cause cancer and so damage the brains of today's young people that they become senile while still in the prime of life. Two official reports by Sir William Stewart - chairman of the official Health Protection Agency and a former government chief scientist - have warned against the dangers, only to be effectively ignored by the Government.

The measures he proposed were moderate and sensible, but were treated with unforgivable contempt. He wanted ministers to circulate a leaflet detailing the potential dangers to every home; they restricted distribution so much that it was hard to get. He asked for information on the widely varying radiation levels of different phones to be put on the handsets and the packaging, so that customers could choose to buy low-radiation models for themselves or their children; ministers pledged to do so, and broke their promise. He recommended that erecting mobile phone masts near schools should be banned unless parents agreed; the Government simply refused. Above all, he insisted that children should be discouraged from using mobiles and that industry should be stopped from promoting them to the young; nothing happened and their use became almost universal.

Now, as we report today, he is privately airing new concerns - about the rapid spread of Wi-Fi technology, particularly in schools. The radiation emitted by the networks is far less than from mobiles, and it is not delivered so close to the head. But it is constant, and involuntary. People who are particularly, and dangerously, sensitive to the radiation will not be able to escape it. Nor will those who might choose not to take the gamble with their health. And as the technology is rolled out to cover whole cities, any refuge will become next to impossible.

The inconvenient truth is that we are conducting a massive experiment on ourselves and particularly on our children. We are surrounding ourselves with an ever-thickening electronic soup the like of which living cells have not encountered during their billions of years of evolution. Of course, all may be well; we may be immune to any ill-effects. But there is enough evidence accumulating to make it seem unlikely that we will be so lucky. As we exclusively reported last week, other members of the animal kingdom - bees - may be even more affected.

We need to stop and think. We should be officially monitoring the effects on the children we expose to the radiation in classrooms. We also need another official inquiry - as authoritative as the Stewart reports on mobile phones - before the technology is deployed further. And this time, ministers must implement what it recommends.