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OPINION HEALTH CANADA'S SAFETY CODE

Canada lagging behind China and Russia: Safety Code 6 needs to be updated now



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Many parents assume that if a wireless gadget is in the marketplace, it is safe for children. Unfortunately, that is not always the case. During the holiday season, I can only imagine how many children received a cell phone or tablet and how few families read the fine print; safety is not guaranteed and worse, Canada's Safety Code 6 is an antiquated regulation that lags behind Russia and China. We must do better.

Industry Canada Minister James Moore's recent announcement regarding improved notification of cell tower requests for towers less than 15 metres is a very important first step in improving the process to avoid the placement of cell towers where families can be harmed. This demonstrates that our government is listening.

Health Canada's Minister Ambrose now has a tremendous opportunity to join countries such as Belgium, France and Israel and put Canada back on

the map for protecting its citizens' health.

Health Canada's Safety Code 6 governs the safety of cell phones, cell towers, Wi-Fi, smart meters and all other devices that now permeate every Canadian home. It impacts all of us, every day, and should protect us. But Safety Code 6 has not been significantly updated since the 1970s, long before Wi-Fi was invented or cell phones were sold.

Smart phone manufacturers Apple, Motorola, and Cisco all publish warnings in their manuals saying their phones, pads and Wi-Fi devices emit radiation shown to cause cancer in lab animals and to avoid over-exposure by holding it away from your body, or to keep a safe distance from "the lower abdomen of a teenage girl." Despite those stern warnings, the same companies are able to put such potentially harmful devices on store shelves in Canada. They are exercising a loophole in Health Canada's archaic safety standards for microwave devices that hasn't been updated in decades, since the first microwave, then the only emitting device in a Canadian home.

Belgium and France have new laws that don't allow manufacturers to market wireless devices to children because they are the

most vulnerable. In Canada, we still force children in schools to be exposed to unmeasured levels of microwave radiation from cell phones and Wi-Fi.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has indicated that direct, long-term contact with wireless radiation is biologically harmful and can potentially have damaging health effects. In August 2011, shortly after the WHO classified radiofrequency radiation (the basis for all wireless devices) as possibly carcinogenic, Health Canada posted a warning that "encourages parents to reduce children's radiofrequency radiation (RF) exposure from cell phones since children are typically more sensitive to a variety of environmental agents". There hasn't been any major progress since then. Canadians are left to read the foreign press to learn about the universal dangers of wireless radiation, if they want to protect their families.

Fortunately the sea is beginning to change across Canada with local governments rejecting Health Canada's antiquated approach to this 21st century health crisis. What we've witnessed in the last six months is much like the national movement that began in Quebec in the early 1990s. Municipalities had rejected the federal government's promise

that all regulated pesticides are safe, and began banning the use of weed spray in urban environments due to high cancer rates.

Municipalities once again are finding their strength in municipal law and proactively ensuring citizens are better protected.

On Dec. 16, 2013, the City of West Vancouver Council voted against a Rogers' application to install three new cell towers along Upper Levels highway. On the same day, the City of Guelph Council passed a motion asking Industry Canada to place a moratorium on the approval of any new radio communication facilities until such time as the review of Safety Code 6 has been finalized. On Dec. 18, 2013, the City of Toronto Council required new Rogers cell towers to comply with Toronto's Prudent Avoidance Policy which sets radiation levels 100 times safer than Health Canada's Safety Code 6. Toronto also updated its protocol for cell towers less than 15 metres tall stating that "City Council encourage Health Canada to actively review health evidence, including the most recent scientific research and studies, related to human exposure to radiofrequencies and to revise Safety Code 6 to meet international best practices, in consultation with the public and appropriate experts."

The towns of Thorold and Oakville, Ont. have already passed similar motions.

What Canada needs is a national approach that acknowledges what independent scientists have conclusively shown: There is no guarantee that children can be exposed to any amount of wireless radiation for any amount of time without a biological impact.

Many of the scientists sounding the alarm bell are the same individuals who warned us about acid rain, second-hand smoke, DDT, asbestos and other widespread public health disasters. As harmful as these banned agents are, none of them were more widespread in our homes than wireless radiation is now. Canada should enter the 21st century of health care—the age of prevention—and prevent another disaster by updating Safety Code 6.

Frank Clegg has played a leadership role in the country's technology sector and in the broader Canadian community for many years. Mr. Clegg, former Microsoft Canada president, is now the volunteer CEO of Canadians for Safe Technology (CAST), a national, not-for-profit, volunteer-based coalition of parents, citizens and experts.

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