



China Disputes Wi-Fi Security Proposal

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A Chinese broadband wireless standards group appealed its rejected standard proposal on Monday, arguing that the current 802.11i standard is "unfair, unjust, and unacceptable".

The Chinese Broadband Wireless IP Standards Working Group (BWIPS) said it believes that it was wronged when its wireless standard amendment was rejected in March. On Monday, the group filed an appeal with the International Standards Organization (ISO) to overturn it.

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According to BWIPS, the amendment would have limited Intel's control over the wireless equipment in China and given the Chinese government much broader power over the wireless activity in their country. Intel backed and helped develop the current 802.11i standard.

The BWIPS amendment, meanwhile, proposed an alternative called WAPI (Wired Authentication and Privacy Infrastructure), which has been backed by the Chinese government since 2003. In 2004, the Chinese government asked Intel to build products to support WAPI and Intel refused.

BWIPS, a semi-official Chinese governmental agency, and the American Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers Inc. (IEEE) both submitted standards amendments

in October to the ISO. The IEEE's amendment, "Amendment 6: Wireless LAN Medium Access Control Security Enhancements," was accepted while BWIPS' amendment, "Amendment 7: Specifications for Enhanced Security – WAPI," was not. The 38-page appeal is an emotional document that calls the rejection "marred by serious ethical and procedural violations...and therefore unfair, unjust and unacceptable."

According to BWIPS, the IEEE's responsibility was to present both proposals in an impartial manner to be voted upon by its international membership. BWIPS said it believes that IEEE acted unethically because it supported Amendment 6 and recommended that WAPI standards not be adopted. In its appeal, the organization called the decision "one-sided, unreasonable and unfair."

But Usha C. V. Haley, a professor with the University of New Haven School of Business and author of "The Chinese Tao of Business: The Logic of Successful Business Strategy," said that China's amendment was also one-sided and unfair.

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"China's WAPI standard could allow backdoor access to the technology, which is not really allowed," she said. "And China has no motivation to prevent backdoor access to the technology so this is one of the tussles. It's very characteristic of Chinese business. China has all kinds of on-the-books and off-the-books trade barriers."

The IEEE released a statement on Tuesday saying that they had an either-or decision

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to make about which amendment to recommend and tried to act as "country-neutral" as possible.

"IEEE believes it would be a failure of the standardization process to simultaneously approve the two equivalent amendments, with each changing the security portion of the base standard in a different way. Nonetheless, the IEEE Working Group has recommended some elements of WAPI technology be standardized...after a process of full review and consensus building."

Intel was one of many members of the IEEE committee that was pushing for Amendment 6, which further secures standards for wireless LAN networks and the Intel products that support them. Amendment 7 would have provided Intel with competition in the wireless arena since they do not have products to support WAPI networks.

"We said we could not build the products because we had insufficient information," said Intel spokesperson Chuck Mulloy. "We couldn't provide products that were compliant with WAPI so we encouraged the Chinese to work through the standards body, which is what they did."

When BWIPS first learned of their rejection in March, they issued a statement explicitly expressing their displeasure with the decision, accusing the IEEE of playing favorites.

"We express our indignation and resolute opposition against IEEE and its agents for their complete disregard for the position of the Chinese side and blind opposition to WAPI," BWIPS said.

WAPI, the Chinese national standard for wireless LAN, is supposed to work on top of WiFi but its compatibility is debatable, the IEEE said in a statement Tuesday defending its position.

"In its current form, [WAPI] is incompatible with the base standard," said the IEEE statement on Tuesday. "If implemented, it would add cost and complexity for manufacturers who serve the Chinese market and it would create confusion and additional cost for consumers in China and around the world who would have to choose among products that do not interoperate."

"Intel is involved because we sit on a lot of standards bodies like a lot of other companies and our wireless technology has been successful worldwide," said Mulloy. "So based on my understanding, China filed an appeal and that is certainly within their rights. We're involved because we're a well known company that participates heavily with the wireless market."

As of Tuesday, the ISO had contacted BWIPS and agreed to investigate the claims laid out in the appeal.

"My understanding of the process is that all of the typical procedures have been followed from the way the ballot was conducted to the closing so everything has been done in accordance with all of the procedures that ISO and IEC follow for their standards," said Stacy Leistner, spokesperson for The American National Standards Institute, which represents the ISO in the U.S.

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