'Super Wi-Fi' heading for US campuses

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Declaration Networks, a company working with colleges and non-profit groups, said it is now starting to offer the service to 500 schools around the United States.

The technology is often referred to as "Super Wi-Fi," although some wireless providers point out it uses a different frequency for transmission than what most people use in cafes and in home networks.

The service uses "white spaces" or unused portions of the spectrum that is generally available for local television broadcasts.

This wireless technology offers a bigger range than existing hotspots, is being deployed in the United States and generating interest in a number of countries, including Britain and Brazil.

Declaration has been working with a consortium of higher education institutions and nonprofits called AIR.U, whose members are interested in improving high-speed wireless access, particularly in rural and other underserved areas.

"We are excited to be accelerating the implementation of next generation networks in educational communities by creating this nationwide sustainable program that will deploy high capacity broadband networks leveraging White Spaces," stated Bob Nichols, chief executive of Declaration Networks Group.

Declaration spokesman Barry Toser said West Virginia University is the first to deploy the service but added that "we are engaging with the other schools."

He said Super Wi-Fi requires no additional equipment for most devices and can have a range of up to five miles (eight kilometers) compared with 350 feet (100 meters) for traditional Wi-Fi.

Toser said colleges will be able to contract with Declaration for access for their campuses, and that residents in nearby communities may also sign up.

The AIR.U initiative, announced in 2012, seeks to establish white space networks in underserved campuses and their surrounding communities. It is supported by Google, Microsoft, New America Foundation and the Appalachian Regional Commission, among others.

The new deployment "responds to the need at many colleges to quickly and easily close gaps in campus broadband connectivity," said Michael Calabrese, director of the Wireless Future Project at the New America Foundation and an AIR.U co-founder.

"Since Super Wi-Fi technology is new, we believe that these initial deployments will quickly give colleges and communities the experience and confidence to plan more extensive deployments in the future."

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