France halts iPhone 12 sales over radiation exposure levels

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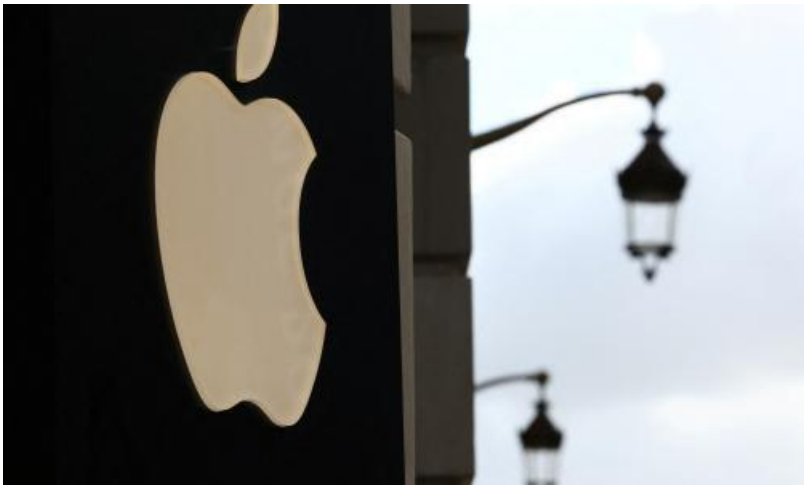

Apple is facing a ban on the sale and potential recall of its iPhone 12 in France, as the US company contests a report that the smartphone exceeds radio frequency exposure limits by the nation's regulator. Apple said on Wednesday its iPhone 12 was certified by multiple international bodies as compliant with global radiation standards, disputing tests by the French ANFR watchdog that said the model emits more electromagnetic waves susceptible to be absorbed by the body than permitted. The watchdog said it had found the phone's specific absorption rate (SAR) – a measure of the rate of radio frequency energy absorbed by the body from a piece of equipment – was 5.74 watts per kilogram during tests simulating the phone being held in the hand or kept in a pocket. The EU standard for SAR is 4.0 watts per kilogram in such tests. The regulator noted the handset complied with multiple other SAR tests it conducted as part of its recent tests on 141 phones. The ANFR said on Tuesday that it would send agents to Apple stores and other distributors to check that the model, which was launched in October 2020 and was recently withdrawn from the company's product line, was no longer being sold. The watchdog said it expected Apple "to deploy all available means to put an end to the non-compliance" and that a failure to act would result in the recall of iPhone 12 handsets already sold to consumers. Apple said that it was engaging with the regulator and that it had presented multiple internal and independent lab results showing the devices were in compliance with all global SAR regulations and safety standards. The company publishes the SAR values of its devices on its site, including for the iPhone 12. Regulators in a number of countries have various limits on the amount of electromagnetic radiation mobile phones may emit to prevent adverse health effects. Handsets are tested for compliance by artificially setting them to their maximum broadcast strength for the various radios they contain with the output measured in numerous tests to simulate being held in a hand or trouser pocket, in a bag or jacket and up to the head for taking calls. The results show the upper limit the phone can reach under its most severe operating conditions, and isn't indicative of typical use. The World Health Organization states on its website that, after a large number of studies, "no adverse health effects have been established as being caused by mobile phone use". Jean-Noel Barrot, the French junior minister for the digital economy, said a software update would be sufficient to fix the radiation issues linked to the phone. He told daily Le Parisien in an interview late on Tuesday that: "Apple is expected to respond within two weeks. If they fail to do so, I am prepared to order a recall of all iPhones 12 in circulation. The rule is the same for everyone, including the digital giants." The ANFR said: "If Apple chooses to update its telephones, it shall be verified by the ANFR." The French watchdog will now pass on its findings to regulators in other EU member states, which "could have a snowball effect", Barrot said. Apple doesn't break down its sales by country or model, though reported revenues

and analyst estimates place Europe as the company's second-largest region for sales behind the Americas. The news of the sales ban came as Apple announced its latest iPhone 15 models, which have adopted the universal USB-C charging connector replacing the firm's proprietary Lightning connectors. It was a change forced by new EU common charger regulations that come into force at the end of the year, which make USB-C the common connector for all consumer electronics, leaving the iPhone one of the last holdouts. The EU hopes the universal standard will save money for consumers and the electronic waste generated by the need to buy separate chargers and cables for different electronic devices.