Cyber attack heats French supermarket freezers

LEVEL B1



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I. WARM-UP

1. When did you last throw away food? Why?
2. What do you keep in your fridge or freezer most of the time?
3. How safe are online systems in shops, in your view?

II. KEY VOCABULARY

cyber attack
a harmful online action that tries to damage or control computers or networks

hacker
a person who uses computers to get into systems without permission

software
programs and code that run on a computer or device

freezer
a machine or part of a fridge that keeps food very cold and hard

spoil
to make food go bad so it cannot be eaten safely

precaution
an action taken to prevent possible harm or problems

investigation
an official process to find out the facts about an event

update
a new version of a program that fixes problems or makes it safer

III. READING

Hundreds of French supermarkets were hit by a cyber attack that took control of the software for their fridges and freezers. Hackers forced some units to heat up; Intermarché said some reached 50C for six hours overnight, so staff threw away food that could be spoiled.

The attack targeted remote-control tools made by Danish company Danfoss. The firm said older cold units could not receive a security update, and it had long advised clients to keep supported systems current. To limit damage, about 100 shops were quickly disconnected from the internet as a precaution.

Figures from retailers suggest around 400 stores, out of roughly 15,000 in France, were affected. Two shops in Alsace put losses at €270,000, and the national total may reach millions. French prosecutors opened an investigation, while EU Food Commissioner Christophe Hansen condemned the hack. Coopérative U's Dominique Schelcher called it unacceptable and urged a swift fix.

Reading text adapted from reporting by **BBC News***: "Fridges in French supermarkets hit by cyber...". Original article linked at theenglishwire.com.*

IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What systems did the cyber attack take control of?
2. Name two supermarket chains mentioned in the report.
3. How hot did some units get, and for how long?
4. About how many stores in France were affected overall?
5. What did French prosecutors do in response to the attack?

V. DISCUSSION

1. How could supermarkets prevent similar attacks in future?
2. Should shops keep old equipment if it cannot get a security update?
3. Would you trust food after a fridge failure? Why or why not?
4. Which services in your area are most at risk from hackers?

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Alternative comparison

Use more/less + adjective/noun + than (or -er + than) to compare; use rather than (would rather + base verb) to show a preference between actions.

"Disconnecting was **more effective than** *waiting for a patch."*

"Staff **would rather disconnect than** *risk spoiled food."*

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Circle the correct option in each sentence.

1. Retailers lost (most / more) stock than usual. _____
2. Older units were (less / least) secure than new ones. _____
3. Engineers prefer patches (to / than) full resets. _____
4. Shops acted (more soon / sooner) than expected. _____
5. Shops went offline (instead of / rather than) wait for a fix. _____

Teacher's Notes

TEACHERS ONLY

These notes are designed to help you get the most out of this lesson. Please do not share this page with students.



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I. LESSON GUIDE

- Timing: 8–10 minutes warm-up, 10 minutes vocabulary, 12–15 minutes reading and comprehension, 8–10 minutes grammar, 10–12 minutes discussion.
- Pre-teach cyber attack, hacker, freezer, spoil, precaution, investigation. Check students know figures like 50C and €270,000.
- Run the reading in two passes: gist (what happened), then detail (names and numbers). This story involves food safety and lost stock; keep discussion on shop policies rather than personal experiences of illness.
- Differentiate by task: stronger students summarise the causes and the response in 60 words; others list the key facts (who, what, where, numbers) with a partner.

II. DISCUSSION FACILITATION TIPS

1. Elicit basic ideas first (updates, backups), then ask which is cheaper and faster to apply.
2. Set up a short for/against debate; prompt with costs, risks, and legal duties.
3. Prompt for signs of safe food (temperature, time) and when to discard it.
4. Have pairs list local services, then rank them by risk and justify their top choice.

III. EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Debate: In groups, write and deliver a 90-second statement on whether to disconnect systems or wait for a fix.

Writing: In pairs, draft a 70-word customer notice explaining what happened and how the store is responding.

IV. ANSWER KEY OVERVIEW

Comprehension questions: short factual answers from the text.

Grammar exercise: Alternative comparison

Discussion: open-ended. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

Answer Key

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IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What systems did the cyber attack take control of?
   The software that controls fridges and freezers.
2. Name two supermarket chains mentioned in the report.
   Intermarché and Coopérative U.
3. How hot did some units get, and for how long?
   About 50C for six hours overnight.
4. About how many stores in France were affected overall?
   Around 400 stores across France.
5. What did French prosecutors do in response to the attack?
   They opened an official investigation.

V. DISCUSSION

Open answers. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Circle the correct option in each sentence.

1. Retailers lost (most / more) stock than usual. **more**
2. Older units were (less / least) secure than new ones. **less**
3. Engineers prefer patches (to / than) full resets. **to**
4. Shops acted (more soon / sooner) than expected. **sooner**
5. Shops went offline (instead of / rather than) wait for a fix. **rather than**

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Key point: Use more/less + adjective/noun + than (or -er + than) to compare; use rather than (would rather + base verb) to show a preference between actions. (Examples constructed.)

> *"Disconnecting was* **more effective than** *waiting for a patch."*
>
> *"Staff* **would rather disconnect than** *risk spoiled food."*