

Germany to Google: Erase raw street-level images

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FILE - An undated file photo provided by Google shows one of their street mapping cars. A data protection official for Germany on Wednesday, May 20, 2009 said that Google had yet to meet a key request that photos gathered for its panoramic, street-level mapping service be erased after they are sent to the United States for processing. (AP Photo/Google, file)

(AP) -- A data protection official for Germany said Wednesday that Google had yet to meet a key request that photos gathered for its panoramic mapping service be erased after they are sent to the United States for processing.

Johannes Caspar, the head of the Hamburg regional office for data protection, said that although Google Inc. made a 13-page response to other requests, the U.S. company didn't make a guarantee on deleting the raw images after the faces, license plates and other information are

scrambled or otherwise rendered unrecognizable.

"We consider this to be highly problematic," Caspar said in a telephone interview.

Google Germany spokesman Stefan Keuchel said the company, based in Mountain View, Calif., would continue to work toward an understanding with data authorities.

"We are looking forward to further discussions and to explaining the technical requirements that we need or how street view works and what we're doing with the data," Keuchel said.

Google's Street View mapping service offers detailed street-level images. Since launching in 2007, it has expanded to more than 100 cities worldwide but has faced privacy complaints from many individuals and institutions that have been photographed.

Greece's Data Protection Authority recently rejected Google's bid to roam Greek streets with cameras mounted on vehicles, while the Pentagon barred Google from photographing U.S. military bases for the service. Residents of a small English village formed a human chain last month to stop one of Google's camera vans.

And residents in Japan complained that the service provided a view over the fences around their homes, prompting Google to agree to reshoot all photos in the country.

Google has assured that it would blur faces and vehicle license plates when displaying the images online and that it would promptly respond to removal requests.

The latest objections from Germany revolve around what happens to the

original images. Germany fears use of the raw information could be abused.

Caspar's said he expected his office would meet with Google to discuss the matter before deciding on any further action.

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