

Swiss official tells Google to erase street views

August 24 2009, By BRADLEY S. KLAPPER , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- A Swiss government official is demanding that Google Inc. immediately take off the Internet any "Street View" images of Switzerland, and the company said Monday it would work to resolve problems with the privacy rights regulator.

Hanspeter Thuer, Switzerland's federal data protection commissioner, said Google's pictures were violating Switzerland's strict privacy laws by failing to obscure people's identities on the mapping service, which offers detailed street-level images.

"Numerous faces and license numbers weren't blurred or were done so inadequately," said Thuer's statement, adding that he "demands that Google Inc. immediately take its [Google Street View](#) online service off the Internet" until it can ensure that public images respect Swiss law.

Since launching in 2007, Street View 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 rejected Google's bid earlier this year 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 in April to stop one of Google's camera vans, while in Japan some complained that

the service provided a view over the fences around their homes, prompting Google to agree to re-shoot all photos in the country.

Thuer met with Google on Monday, and his office said a number of questions remained open.

Google said in a statement it would hold further discussions to "demonstrate our industry-leading applications for protecting the private sphere."

"Since the launch last week the product has proven to be very popular with the Swiss people," said Peter Fleischer, Google's global privacy counsel. "[Google Maps](#) had an 80 percent increase in volume and only a small number of requests to erase pictures."

Google [Switzerland](#) spokesman Matthias Meyer said these problems needed to be understood in the context of millions of pictures. When complaints have been made, Google has responded.

"In cases where a deletion or further blending was demanded, we have shown that our technology works very effectively," Meyer said. "In most cases, the pictures are deleted within hours."

One Swiss image made news over the weekend as it clearly captured national parliamentarian Ruedi Noser on the street walking with a woman.

The woman has been identified as his assistant, but the weekly NZZ am Sonntag quoted Noser as demanding the "instant shutdown of Street View" until [Google](#) can guarantee that it properly hides the identities of people in 100 percent of cases.

"There is probably no problem for my wife, as you could also recognize

my companion in the picture," the paper quoted Noser as saying.

The Swiss media has been littered with negative reactions to the images, but the pro-business NZZ urged a cautious regulatory response.

"Shutting it down would be wrong," it said in an opinion article. "The people in the pictures are coincidental extras and not victims of paparazzi."

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