

Austria bans Google's street view cars over privacy

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The camera of a Google Street View car. Austria has placed a temporary ban on Google Street View cars while it probes concerns that the Internet company used the vehicles to collect private data, a statement said Friday.

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The country's Data Protection Commission (DSK) said all collection of data or use of previously gathered information by [Google](#) Street View in Austria would be banned until the probe was concluded, according to the statement on its website.

"To clarify the matter, we are asking Google... to present a precise technical description of its data-collection activities by June 7, 2010, as well as to answer a detailed questionnaire," it said.

The move follows similar investigations in the United States, Germany and Italy after Google admitted its Street View cars, which have been cruising and taking photographs of cities in over 30 countries, had inadvertently gathered fragments of personal data sent over unsecured Wi-Fi systems.

The probe could take about two months, according to commission member Waltraut Kotschy.

Google co-founder Sergey Brin said last week that the company had "screwed up" by accidentally gathering private wireless data while taking pictures for its "Street View" [mapping service](#).

But critics argue this was no accident.

"Does Google think people are stupid? Identifying and recording the WLAN (wireless Internet network) can only be done intentionally and this data of course contains personal information," data protection expert Hans Zeger told the Salzburger Nachrichten newspaper.

[Private data](#) obtained in this way could not only be used for commercial but also ultimately for criminal purposes, he warned.

[Street View](#) allows users to view panoramic street scenes on [Google Maps](#).

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