

German prosecutors probing Google's mapping breach

May 19 2010, By MELISSA EDDY , Associated Press Writer



In this Sept. 25, 2007 file picture a visitor passes an exhibition stand of Google company in Duesseldorf, western Germany. German prosecutors have launched an investigation of Google Inc. in connection with a privacy breach that involved it recording fragments of people's online activities through unsecured Wi-Fi networks. Hamburg prosecutor Wilhelm Moellers told the news agency DAPD on Wednesday May 19, 2010 that his office launched the investigation after a complaint was filed with their office against unknown Google employees. (AP Photo/Rene Tillmann, file)

(AP) -- German prosecutors are investigating Google Inc. on suspicion it violated privacy laws when it recorded fragments of people's online activities through unsecured Wi-Fi networks.

Google acknowledged the privacy breach in an apology issued last Friday, saying it had been inadvertently storing fragments of people's online activities over the past four years. Google captured the

information as its vehicles roamed streets gathering images and data for its mapping feature, "Street View."

Hamburg prosecutor Wilhelm Moellers told the news agency DAPD that his office launched an investigation after a complaint was filed against undisclosed Google employees. "We will above all have to clarify whether the offense was deliberate," Moellers said.

Google's disclosure aggravated suspicions about the company that that have been building across Europe, where strict privacy laws regulate how many personal details may be released or shared without the subject's consent.

In London, Britain's Information Commissioner's Office joined Germany in calling for Google to destroy the data, although it said it was unlikely that anything more than fragments of data had been collected. The Czech Office for Personal Data Protection also said it is investigating Google for failing to meet necessary requirements needed to collect data used for Street View.

The incident has also raised concerns among at least two U.S. lawmakers who are leading voices on technology and telecommunications issues in Congress but generally don't see eye to eye with each other on much.

Rep. Joe Barton, R-Texas, and Rep. Edward Markey, D-Mass., sent a letter to the Federal Trade Commission on Wednesday asking whether the agency is investigating the matter and whether Google's actions are illegal under U.S. law. Barton is the top Republican on the House Energy and Commerce Committee, while Markey is a key Democrat on the Subcommittee on Communications, Technology and the Internet.

The FTC did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

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Citation: German prosecutors probing Google's mapping breach (2010, May 19) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-05-german-prosecutors-probing-google-breach.html>

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