

Australia launches privacy investigation of Google

June 6 2010



In this Oct. 2, 2006 file photo, a Google receptionist works at the front desk in the company's office in New York. Australia announced a police investigation Sunday, June 6, 2010 into whether Google illegally collected private information from wireless networks, becoming at least the second country to probe the Internet giant's "Street View" mapping service. The Australian criminal investigation comes as more regulators and consumers watchdogs around the world are complaining that Google doesn't take people's privacy seriously enough. Google maintains that its users' privacy is one of the company's highest priorities. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan, File)

(AP) -- Australia announced a police investigation Sunday into whether Google illegally collected private information from wireless networks, becoming at least the second country to probe the Internet giant's "Street View" mapping service.

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consumers watchdogs around the world are complaining that [Google](#) doesn't take people's privacy seriously enough. Google maintains that its users' privacy is one of the company's highest priorities.

Last month, Google acknowledged it had mistakenly collected fragments of data over public Wi-Fi networks in more than 30 countries while it was taking pictures of neighborhoods for the [Street View](#) feature. Google said it discovered the problem after German regulators launched an inquiry into the matter.

Also last month, the head of the House Judiciary Committee in the U.S., Michigan Democrat John Conyers, sent letters to Google and Facebook urging them to cooperate with any government privacy inquiries. Conyers asked Google to retain the data until any inquiries are complete.

The Australian probe follows questions over whether Google employees taking photographs for the mapping service violated the country's [privacy laws](#).

"In light of concerns having been raised by the public, my department thought there were issues of substance that were raised that require police investigation," Australia's Federal Attorney General Robert McClelland told journalists in Melbourne.

The case was referred to the Australian Federal Police on Friday, he said. It will focus on whether the company breached the country's telecommunications interceptions act, which prevents people accessing electronic communications other than for authorized purposes, he said.

Google has characterized its collection of snippets from e-mails and [Web surfing](#) done on public Wi-Fi networks as an error and said it has taken steps to avoid a recurrence.

"This was a mistake," Google said in a statement on the Australian case. "We are talking to the appropriate authorities to answer any questions they have."

Street View provides photographs of neighborhoods taken by Google cameras. The service has been enormously controversial in Germany and other countries as privacy groups and authorities fear that people - filmed without their consent - could be seen doing things they didn't want to be seen doing or in places where they didn't want to be seen.

Last month, Communications Minister Stephen Conroy, addressing the Australian accusations, said Google was responsible for the "single greatest breach in the history of privacy."

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