

# Private data from Austria, Denmark, Ireland deleted: Google

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Picture taken on March 2010 shows the camera of a street view car, used to photograph whole streets in the northern German city of Hanover. Google has deleted private wireless data mistakenly collected by its "Street View" cars in Austria, Denmark and Ireland, the Internet giant said in a letter to US lawmakers.

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Google, in the letter posted online Friday on the website of the Energy and Commerce Committee of the US House of Representatives, also reiterated that the data was never used in any Google product or service.

Google also repeated an apology for the gathering of personal information sent over unsecured wireless networks by the Street View cars used to create the panoramic pictures featured in Google Maps

The letter from Pablo Chavez, Google's director of public policy, was in response to questions posed by US Congressmen Henry Waxman, Joe Barton and Edward Markey to Google chief executive Eric Schmidt.

According to Google, Street View cars taking photographs of cities in more than 30 countries inadvertently gathered fragments of personal information, so-called payload data, sent over unsecured Wi-Fi systems.

In the letter, Chavez said that "at the request of authorities in Ireland, Denmark, and Austria, we deleted payload data identified as coming from those countries."

He said data gathered in the United States was being retained for legal reasons and did not address the situation in other countries.

"We have been retaining data collected in the United States, consistent with our obligations related to pending civil litigation matters," Chavez said.

Google is facing civil suits in Oregon and several other US states demanding millions of dollars in damages over its collection of personal wireless data.

Google is accused of violating local and federal privacy laws but Chavez said he did not believe Google had broken US law.

"We believe it does not violate US law to collect payload data from networks that are configured to be openly accessible (i.e., not secured by encryption and thus accessible by any user's device)," he said.

"We emphasize that being lawful and being the right thing to do are two different things, and that collecting payload data was a mistake for which we are profoundly sorry," Chavez said.

"Maintaining people's trust is crucial to everything we do and, by mistakenly using code that collected payload data, we fell short," he said. "We are determined to learn all the lessons we can from our mistake."

Chavez said "the payload data has never been used in any Google product or service" and only two Google engineers had ever had access to it.

"The first instance involved the individual engineer who designed the software," he said.

"The second instance was when we became aware that payload data may have been collected from unencrypted WiFi networks and a single security engineer tested the data to verify that this was the case."

Chavez also stressed that Google has stopped the collection of Wi-Fi data, used to provide location-based services such as driving directions in Google Maps and other products, by Street View cars.

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