

# Australia: Google Street View broke privacy law

July 9 2010, By KRISTEN GELINEAU , Associated Press Writer

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(AP) -- Google broke Australia's privacy law when it collected private information from wireless networks, the country's privacy commissioner said Friday, following an investigation into the Internet giant's "Street View" mapping service.

Several other countries are investigating Google over the data collection, and there are growing concerns from regulators and consumer watchdogs worldwide that Google isn't serious enough about people's privacy - a charge the company denies.

In May, 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.

At the time, Australia's Communications Minister Stephen Conroy dubbed it the "single greatest breach in the history of privacy."

On Friday, Privacy Commissioner Karen Curtis said her investigation was complete and she had determined Google breached the nation's Privacy Act.

"Collecting personal information in these circumstances is a very serious matter," Curtis said in a statement. "Australians should reasonably expect that private communications remain private."

In almost all cases, the privacy commissioner is barred from imposing punishments, though he or she can occasionally order a party to pay compensation for a violation depending on an investigation's findings. In the Google investigation, Curtis said the privacy act prevented her from imposing any punishment as she had initiated the investigation.

Instead, she said the company has promised to conduct a privacy impact assessment on any new Street View projects involving personal information and regularly consult with her about [personal data](#) collection activities in [Australia](#).

Curtis said Google had also agreed to publish an apology to Australians on its official blog - which it did.

"We want to reiterate to Australians that this was a mistake for which we are sincerely sorry," wrote Alan Eustace, Google's top engineering executive. "Maintaining people's trust is crucial to everything we do and we have to earn that trust every single day. We are acutely aware that we failed badly here."

Google declined to comment beyond its blog statement.

The Australian Federal Police is conducting a separate criminal investigation of Google over Street View. That probe focuses on whether the company breached the country's telecommunications interceptions act, which prevents people accessing electronic communications other than for authorized purposes.

Street View provides photographs of neighborhoods taken by [Google](#) cameras. The service has been extremely controversial in Germany and other countries as [privacy](#) groups and authorities fear that people - filmed without their consent - might be photographed doing things they wouldn't want publicized.

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Citation: Australia: Google Street View broke privacy law (2010, July 9) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-07-australia-google-street-view-broke.html>

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