

Google to resume taking 'Street View' photos next week

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A Google "Street View" car in Hanover Germany in March 2010. Google's "Street View" cars will return to the road next week but all wireless scanning equipment has been removed after a controversy over the collection of private information.

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Google said Friday that the camera-equipped cars, which drive around taking photographs for the Internet giant's free online mapping service, would resume operating in four countries next week and in others later.

"Having spoken to the relevant regulators, we have decided to start

Street View driving in Ireland, Norway, South Africa and Sweden again starting next week," Brian McClendon, a Google vice president of engineering, said in a blog post.

"We expect to add more countries in time."

Google grounded all Street View cars in May after disclosing that they had mistakenly gathered snippets of private data sent over unsecured wireless networks.

The Mountain View, California-based search and advertising titan is facing lawsuits and investigations in a number of countries in connection with private wireless data collected by Street View cars.

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.

McClendon said the cars "will no longer collect any Wi-Fi information at all, but will continue to collect photos and 3D imagery as they did before."

He said Wi-Fi data collection equipment has been removed from its cars in each country.

"We recognize that serious mistakes were made in the collection of Wi-Fi payload data, and we have worked to quickly rectify them," McClendon added.

"However, we also believe that Street View is a great product for users, whether people want to find a hotel, check out a potential new home or find a restaurant."

Google, meanwhile, issued an apology in Australia over the collection of private data there by Street View cars and pledged to work "even more closely" with the country's privacy commissioner in the future.

"We want to reiterate to Australians that this was a mistake for which we are sincerely sorry," Google senior vice president Alan Eustace said in a post on the Google Australia blog.

"Maintaining people's trust is crucial to everything we do and we have to earn that trust every single day," Eustace said. "We are acutely aware that we failed badly here."

Street View, which was launched in 2006, lets users view panoramic street scenes on Google Maps and take a virtual "walk" through cities such as New York, Paris or Hong Kong.

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