

Apple, Google asked to testify on mobile privacy

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US lawmakers have invited Apple and Google to attend a hearing on privacy next month following claims the iPhone and Android devices regularly track a user's location and stores the data. US Senator Al Franken, pictured in March 2011, chairman of the Judiciary Subcommittee on Privacy, Technology and the Law, said he will hold a hearing on "Protecting Mobile Privacy" on May 10.

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A Florida lawyer filed a lawsuit meanwhile against Apple on behalf of two owners of products made by the California-based gadget-maker.

Lawyer Aaron Meyer, in the suit filed with a US District Court, claimed the location-tracking violated the privacy of the owners of an iPhone and

an iPad.

In Washington, US Senator Al Franken, chairman of the Judiciary Subcommittee on Privacy, Technology and the Law, said he will hold a hearing on "Protecting Mobile Privacy" on May 10.

Franken said representatives of Apple and Google had been invited along with officials from the Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission to attend the hearing.

"Recent advances in mobile technology have allowed Americans to stay connected like never before and put an astonishing number of resources at our fingertips," the Democrat from Minnesota said in a statement.

"But the same technology that has given us smartphones, tablets, and cellphones has also allowed these devices to gather extremely sensitive information about users, including detailed records of their daily movements and location," he said.

"This hearing is the first step in making certain that federal laws protecting consumers' privacy -- particularly when it comes to mobile devices -- keep pace with advances in technology," Franken said.

The House Energy and Commerce Committee sent letters meanwhile to Apple, Google, Microsoft, Nokia, Research in Motion, and Hewlett-Packard asking whether their devices are tracking, storing, and sharing users' locations.

The congressional focus on mobile privacy comes after a pair of British researchers, Alasdair Allan and Pete Warden, said a position-logging feature is contained in iOS 4, the latest operating system for the iPhone and iPad.

According to Allan and Warden, iOS 4-equipped iPhones and iPads store latitude and longitude coordinates along with a time stamp, probably through cell-tower triangulation.

They noted that cellphone companies typically have access to this data but it is not usually stored on a mobile device itself.

Apple and Google, which provides its Android software to handset makers for free, have not yet responded to the privacy questions.

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