

## Federal Sony data breach lawsuit settled, lawyer says

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This Dec. 19, 2014 file photo shows an exterior view of the Sony Pictures Plaza building in Culver City, Calif. Lawyers for former Sony Pictures Entertainment employees whose data was breached last year say they have tentatively reached a settlement with the company. A filing on Wednesday, Sept. 2, 2015, in a proposed class action lawsuit does not detail settlement terms or how many current and former Sony employees would be covered by the settlement. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes, File)

Former Sony Pictures Entertainment employees whose personal

information was posted online last year after a massive data breach have reached a settlement in a proposed class action lawsuit, their attorneys said Wednesday.

The settlement was announced in a filing in a federal lawsuit that was seeking class-action status on behalf of nearly 50,000 current and former Sony employees whose private personal, financial and medical information was posted online. The filing does not detail the settlement's terms or how many people would be covered under it.

"We believe the proposed settlement is a favorable resolution of the claims asserted by the plaintiffs," attorney Daniel C. Girard wrote in the filing.

Girard did not return an email message seeking further comment. Sony declined comment on the settlement, which was reached Tuesday but still needs to be crafted into a formal agreement. Additional details about the settlement are expected to be filed in a Los Angeles federal court by mid-October.

At least 10 former Sony employees sued the company in U.S. District Court in Los Angeles over the breach. A hearing on whether the case would achieve class-action status had been scheduled for Sept. 14. Cases filed in Los Angeles Superior Court remain active.

The federal lawsuits accused Sony of failing to protect employees' data, especially in light of previous breaches of the company's servers.

A complaint by Sony Pictures' former director of technology Lionel Felix cited previous hacks on Sony's servers, including a 2011 attack that breached millions of accounts of its PlayStation Network. It also cited a security audit from earlier this year that found faults with the company's electronic security procedures.

Other former employees criticized Sony's response to the data breach, contending the company emphasized protecting its public image instead of ensuring that its workers were protected from identity theft as a result of having their Social Security numbers, salary details and other sensitive data posted online.

The breach, which became public in November and was later linked by the FBI to North Korea, included the posting of a trove of internal company emails and the leak of several unreleased films.

The materials are still creating headaches for the studio, which this week has been defending itself against claims that it altered the upcoming Will Smith film "Concussion" to keep from running afoul of the NFL. The film dramatizes the work of forensic pathologist, Dr. Bennet Omalu, who uncovered the fatal effects that repeated head trauma has had on many NFL players.

Users of the online discussion site Reddit and then the New York Times used leaked emails this week to try to show that Sony watered down the film to avoid a confrontation with the NFL.

Sony has called the Times story misleading.

"As will become immediately clear to anyone actually seeing the movie, nothing with regard to this important story has been 'softened' to placate anyone," Sony wrote in a statement.

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