

Google's location tracking: FTC probe urged, Australia inquiry begins

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Location, location, location. Is Google tracking Android users' whereabouts without their permission?

That's the question lawmakers are asking in the United States, and regulators are investigating in Australia.

Sens. Richard Blumenthal, D-Connecticut, and Ed Markey, D-Massachusetts, wrote the Federal Trade Commission on Monday, urging it to investigate Google's collection of [location data](#).

"Based on our investigation and public reports on Location History, we have significant reservations about Google's failure to clearly account for how that [location](#) data is collected and used by the company," the senators wrote.

They cited a Quartz report in November that showed the company collects location information from Android users even when they have turned off location services, haven't used any apps or even inserted a SIM card.

The senators had earlier asked the company to explain its collection of location data, and were not satisfied by the company's response in January. Among the questions that remain: whether Google actually gives users the right to opt out of location tracking, as the company says it does, and whether Google is being transparent about how it's using location data.

"Google has an intimate understanding of personal lives as they watch their users seek the support of reproductive health services, engage in civic activities, or attend places of religious worship," the senators wrote. "Most consumers do not understand the level, granularity, and reach of Google's data collection."

Google has not returned a request for comment about the senators' letter. When reached Tuesday, the FTC said it had no comment.

In Australia, regulators are investigating how Google is collecting data from Android phones—including location information—reportedly after longtime foe Oracle made a presentation to regulators there, repeating media reports that Android phones track location even when location services are turned off.

Like the U.S. senators, Australian regulators question whether consumers have given valid consent for the extent of Google's information collection.

"We are exploring how much consumers know about the use of location data and are working closely with the privacy commissioner," Rod Sims, chairman of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, told the Guardian.

Google has not returned a request for comment about the Australian inquiry.

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