

Google warned by EU over Street View map photos

February 25 2010, By AOIFE WHITE , AP Business Writer



File - In an Oct. 14, 2009 file photo a sign designates the Google headquarters in Mountain View, Calif. Three Google executives were convicted of privacy violations Wednesday Feb. 24, 2010 in Italy because juveniles posted a video online of an autistic boy being abused. (AP Photo/Paul Sakuma/file)

(AP) -- European Union data privacy regulators are telling Google Inc. to warn people before it sends cameras out into cities to take pictures for its Street View maps, adding to the company's legal worries in Europe.

Google should shorten the time it keeps the original photos from one year to six months, regulators also said in a letter to the company obtained by The Associated Press on Thursday.

[Google](#) was not immediately available for comment.

[Street View](#) launched in the U.S. in 2007 and now adds photos of real-life street scenes to Google's maps of around 100 cities worldwide. To soothe privacy concerns, it uses special software to blur pictures of faces and car license plates.

Google has been slow to roll out the service in Europe after governments raised concerns that taking pictures of people in public places could break some EU rules on personal privacy.

Greece told the company last year to halt plans to snap the nation's streets until more privacy safeguards are provided and in April, residents of one English village formed a human chain to stop a camera van.

Google has also bowed to German demands to erase the raw footage of faces, house numbers, license plates and individuals who have told authorities they do not want their information used in the service.

EU Justice Commissioner Viviane Reding said that Europe had "high standards for data protection" and that she expected that "all companies play according to the rules of the game."

The head of EU data protection agencies, Alex Turk, told Google's data privacy chief Peter Fleischer in a letter dated Feb. 11 that the company should always give advance notice on its Web site and in the local or national press before it takes pictures.

It should take care to avoid taking pictures "of a sensitive nature and those containing intimate details not normally observable by a passer-by," Turk said.

He also said that the company should revise its "disproportionate" policy of keeping the original unblurred images for up to a year, saying improvements in Google's blurring technology and better public

awareness would lead to fewer complaints - and a shorter delay for people to react to the photos they see on the site.

Complaints about the images put online would usually be checked against the original photos.

The data privacy warning comes a day after an Italian court convicted three Google executives - including Fleischer - of [privacy](#) violations because they did not act quickly enough to remove an online video that showed sadistic teen bullies mocking and hitting an autistic boy.

Google said it would appeal the case, claiming it attacked freedom of speech on the Internet.

Also Wednesday, EU antitrust authorities said that Google's rivals have complained that it demotes their sites in the rankings it uses on its search engine, the world's most popular. The EU said it was not opening an antitrust case - and Google said it had done nothing wrong.

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