

UK: Google was in 'significant breach' of data law

November 3 2010



In this March 2, 2010 file photo, a woman decorates a camera car of Google at the CeBIT in Hannover, northern Germany. British authorities say Google breached data protection laws when its Street View mapping service scooped up data from private wireless networks. (AP Photo/Joerg Sarbach, File)

Google violated Britain's data protection laws when its Street View mapping service recorded data from private wireless networks, the country's information commissioner said Wednesday.

The American Internet search giant will escape any fines, however, so long as it pledges not to do it again.

Google Inc. drew international outrage after it emerged that its Street View cars, which take street-level photographs to illustrate the company's popular mapping service, had also been scooping up e-mails, Internet addresses and passwords from unencrypted wireless networks.

Scotland Yard recently said it would not launch a criminal inquiry into the breach, which the company has described as inadvertent.

Information Commissioner Christopher Graham was recently given the power to levy fines up to 500,000 pounds (about \$800,000) for serious violations, but he said in a statement that the "most appropriate and proportionate regulatory action" would be to seek a written assurance from Google that the breach would not be repeated and conduct an audit of the company's data protection practices.

The company based in Mountainview, California said in a statement that it "was profoundly sorry" for the breach, adding that it had since worked to improve its internal controls.

"We did not want this data, have never used any of it on our products and services, and have sought to delete it as quickly as possible," the statement said.

Google's street mapping program has dogged by privacy concerns since its launch, and authorities across the world have mounted a variety of probes into the tech company's practices. Only last week, Italian prosecutors announced an investigation into the feature for suspected violations, while officials in Spain said that Google faced not one but two probes into the program.

In October Canada's privacy commissioner said the company WiFi-grabbing practices broke the law, while Street View's German launch has been delayed by months of wrangling over privacy issues.

Nevertheless, the service remains popular. The British Information Commissioner's Office invites Web users to locate its address using Google Maps.

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Citation: UK: Google was in 'significant breach' of data law (2010, November 3) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-11-uk-google-significant-breach-law.html>

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