Google confession: Yes, we track your location, even when you turn off Location History
20 August 2018, by Seung Lee, The Mercury News

In a statement to this news organization, a Google spokesperson said, “We have been updating the explanatory language about Location History to make it more consistent and clear across our platforms and help centers.” The spokesperson did not address why Google continued collecting location data even when the user chose to turn off its location history.

The Associated Press report alarmed privacy researchers, as collecting continuous location data may carry privacy risks, with one calling Google’s practice “dishonest.” The Associated Press corroborated their findings with computer science researchers at Princeton University before publication.

Google takes snapshots of the user’s Location History when the Maps app is opened, the weather widget on Android phones updates and during some Google searches that have nothing to do with location, according to the Associated Press. After the snapshot, Google saves it to the user’s account.

In order to turn off snapshots from Google apps and services, users need to turn off both Location History and Web & App Activity settings, according to the Associated Press.

The Associated Press started its investigation after a graduate researcher at UC Berkeley noticed that her Android phone’s Google Maps app wanted her to rate a shopping trip to Kohl’s despite her having shut off Location History. The researcher, K. Shankari, wrote about her discovery and her personal questions in a blog post on a UC Berkeley research website.

“Data collection for web browsing and social media is currently under intense scrutiny, but smartphone sensors can be the source of even more privacy...
sensitive data, collected completely without human interaction," wrote Shankari. "Issues around consent, control and trust are currently fuzzy in this domain due to the blurring of boundaries between the phone operating system and proprietary services. ... How can we truly know what closed source software is actually collecting and when it is doing so?"

©2018 The Mercury News (San Jose, Calif.)
Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.
APA citation: Google confession: Yes, we track your location, even when you turn off Location History (2018, August 20) retrieved 9 October 2022 from https://phys.org/news/2018-08-google-track-history.html

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.