

Google

**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

Googles's Eyes

Privacy and Security in the Internet (I) Google's Eyes

March 14, 2013

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. This report is about a press release from the Texas Attorney General. The report is reproduced on the following pages. The release speaks for itself in most regards. I have added some thoughts, which are placed in red text and italicized.

Google has published its "Ten Things We Know to Be True" proclamation. Its first statement is:¹

Since the beginning, we've focused on providing the best user experience possible. Whether we're designing a new Internet browser or a new tweak to the look of the homepage, we take great care to ensure that they will ultimately serve you, rather than our own internal goal or bottom line.

I admire Google. The owners and employees embody a different and refreshing view of what a company should be doing with the society in which it exists. But they need to be more careful about where they tread. With their power, they can easily discount the noble statements they issue. Their first mission statement above does not ring true with their actions described below.

¹ <http://www.google.com/about/company/philosophy/>.



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

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Texas, 37 States Resolve Lengthy Investigation into Google Street View's Unlawful Collection of Personal Information

AUSTIN – Texas, 37 other states and the District of Columbia today resolved their lengthy investigation into Google Inc.'s collection of personal information – including e-mail and search histories -- from unsecured wireless routers at private residences and businesses. Although Google initially denied *[How could they deny something that they knew they were doing?]* that its Street View vehicles were retrieving this private information, the Mountain View, Calif.-based conglomerate subsequently acknowledged that it had “mistakenly” engaged in this practice. *[Really? How does software, written with meticulous precision, “mistakenly” engage in privacy espionage? Answer: It cannot. It has to be designed to do so.]* Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott provided this statement about the agreement negotiated by the states:

“For two years, Google violated Texans’ privacy rights and secretly collected personal information from their wireless routers. Today’s agreement requires Google to destroy any personal data that was improperly collected and imposes important new privacy protections that govern the Street View program going forward.”

Google’s data collection effort was tied to its Street View project, which sought to enhance its Google Maps platform by deploying a fleet of vehicles nationwide to photograph residences, businesses and other improvements in municipal neighborhoods. Unbeknownst to the residents and business owners whose properties were photographed, Google’s Street View vehicles were outfitted with specialized data collection devices that also scanned and stored payload data from wireless networks that were not password protected. *[The Google system was not “mistakenly” capturing this information. It was designed to capture it.]*

Initially, Google maintained that no emails, Web search histories or other personal information was being collected by Street View vehicles – and that the collected information was limited to data that merely identified the existence and location of a wireless network. *[A person cannot go about taking passive photos of mail boxes and not be aware he or she is actively “wire tapping” the home where the mail box is located.]*

For the wireless sniffing, the hardware and software had to be designed to scan wi-fi frequencies, detect clear data, and then copy it.]

The State's investigation subsequently revealed that despite assertions to the contrary, Google collected private information that was transmitted over unencrypted WiFi networks for two years. Although information transmitted on these wireless networks was collected from 2010 to 2012, Google represented that it had not intended to collect and store network users' private payload data. *[What can I say, that I did not say before? I fail to grasp how software can unintentionally collect and store data.]*

Under today's agreement, Google must pay \$7 million and comply with following requirements:

- Destroy the "payload data" it collected;
- Notify network users and obtain their consent before using its Street View vehicles to collect any additional "payload data"; *["payload" in the context of making millions of dollars on this information]*
- Implement an employee training program that highlights network users' privacy and maintain the training program for the next 10 years *[We must "train" our technical personnel to look at streets and houses, and not tap into private networks while taking pictures.]*
- Develop a public service campaign to educate network users about how to better secure their personal information while they are using wireless networks.

[If you or I were to tap into a land-based phone line to listen-in on someone's private communications, we could be hauled to jail. But if we listen-in on a wi-fi communications, we are admonished with a fine and stay out of jail.]

Attorney General Abbott urged Texans to protect their privacy by securing their home computer systems and activating encryption features to make sure that transmitted information is scrambled.

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