

SKorea: GOOGLE Violates Law with 'Street View'

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Google's high-flying Street View service is in violation of Korea's Internet privacy laws, police said Thursday night. According to the Cyber Terror Response Center, the National Police Agency's Internet crime unit, the conglomerate's Street View mapping service had gathered sensitive private information from unencrypted wireless networks during the filming process.

"We succeeded in breaking the encryption behind the hard drives, and confirmed that it contained personal e-mails and text messages of people using the Wi-Fi networks," said a police official.

This puts the Internet global conglomerate in violation of the country's law on protection of telecommunications privacy.

Police raided its Korean branch office, Google Korea, last August and confiscated computer hard drives and paper documents.

Police have investigated about 10 company officials, all of whom have claimed that they were simply following orders from headquarters.

"We are looking to penalize whoever ordered and developed the program, but are unsure as of yet who that might be," said a police official.

"Even after we confirm the identity of the suspect, we believe it will most likely be a U.S. citizen, and it is unclear whether the Korean Police Agency can prosecute those involved," he said.

The images of cities in Korea were being collected since October until Google acknowledged months afterwards that it had "accidentally" picked up private information from unsecured Wi-Fi networks, in more than 30 different countries, while filming streets with its fleet of camera-equipped cars.

"As soon as we realized what had happened, we stopped collecting all Wi-Fi data from our Street View cars and immediately informed the authorities," said a Google Korea spokesperson.

"We have been cooperating with the Korean Communications Commission and the police, and will continue to do so."

"Our ultimate objective remains to delete the data consistent with our legal obligations and in consultation with the appropriate authorities," he said.

Google has drawn fire all over the world, with 40 U.S. states also demanding information gathered from the mapping service, to determine whether a breach of private information has taken place. In the U.S., Google headquarters refused to hand over the information gathered through the program.