



July 7, 2010

The Honorable Henry A. Waxman
United States House of Representatives
2204 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-0530

Dear Chairman Waxman:

We write to warn you that with commonplace technologies, the Internet and email activity at the homes of Members of Congress can easily be spied upon. We are sure of this because Google recently admitted it has collected large quantities of internet data from houses all over the United States. One of these houses may have been yours. We know this because we recently performed a simulation of Google's operation and sent "packet sniffers" to the neighborhoods of several Members. In several locations we found unencrypted networks, including in the vicinity of your residence in Washington, DC. Of course, we did not examine or store any information other than basic information about the networks, but we can't say the same about Google.

Attached and available on our InsideGoogle.org web site are pictures of your residence taken by Google Street View cars. We know now that Google not only took pictures of your home, the company also attempted to record your wireless Internet data. We call on the House Energy and Commerce Committee to investigate and hold hearings on these privacy invasions by Google.

Recently Google admitted its Street View cars were not just taking photographs but snooping on countless private WiFi networks over the last three years as they prowled streets in thirty countries around the world. We have duplicated Google's method of locating networks, but unlike Google, we scrupulously avoided recording "payload data." We found that some members may have open WiFi networks that Google likely spied on.

Never asking permission, Google is amassing unprecedented amounts of data about individuals so it can target us for personalized advertising. Consumers are tracked not just on the Internet, but in their very own homes. As far as Google is concerned, an individual's home is not his castle, but a gold mine of personal data that can be sold to advertisers at a hefty premium.

Google's practice directly affects you, as the enclosed information about your residence shows. We gathered address data from public records and then found the photographs of your residence from Google Maps and its Street View option. Your home is on display for the entire Internet with just a few clicks of a computer mouse. A Street View picture of your home means Google also tried to tap into your personal WiFi networks, possibly in violation of federal wiretapping laws. From in front of your residence, we were able to detect two unencrypted wireless networks labeled "default" and "franksfolly2." This means that Google, when it photographed your residence, may also have intercepted the private internet data of you or your neighbors. If your own wireless system was unencrypted, Google may have recorded your electronic communications with your colleagues, staff, families and friends. Potential state secrets remain in the custody of Google's servers.

In addition, as mentioned above, our own limited investigation confirmed that the home networks of some senior members of your committee whose houses appear on Street View are indeed vulnerable to the type of signal sensing equipment used by Google. This leaves little question that Google is currently in possession of sensitive data from the information networks used by members of Congress in their residences.

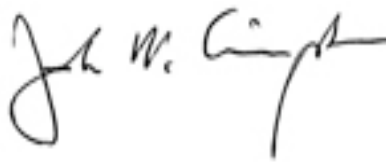
Because of your position, we believe this is not just an invasion of privacy but an unwarranted intrusion by Google into legislative branch matters. In our view, you have the right to demand that Google disclose to you any information it has collected regarding your home wireless networks.

In addition we urge the Energy and Commerce Committee to, at its earliest convenience, hold a hearing on Google's WiSpying and data gathering practices.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jamie Court".

Jamie Court
President

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "John M. Simpson".

John M. Simpson
Consumer Advocate

6/29/2010

Google maps

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Address is approximate

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