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Google to pay \$68m to settle lawsuit claiming it recorded private conversations

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Technology reporter



Google has agreed to pay \$68m (£51m) to settle a lawsuit claiming it secretly listened to people's private conversations through their phones.

Users accused Google Assistant - a virtual assistant present on many Android devices - of recording private conversations after it was inadvertently triggered on their devices.

They claimed the recordings were then shared with advertisers in order to send them targeted advertising.

The BBC has contacted Google for comment. But in a filing seeking to settle the case, it denied wrongdoing and said it was seeking to avoid litigation.

Google Assistant is designed to wait in standby mode until it hears a particular phrase - typically "Hey Google" - which activates it.

The phone then records what it hears and sends the recording to Google's servers where it can be analysed.

People use it for various reasons, ranging from simple questions about the weather to interacting with smart devices like lights and televisions.

The firm says it does not send audio anywhere while it is in standby mode.

But the lawsuit claimed Google Assistant would sometimes turn on by mistake - the phone thinking someone had said its activation phrase when they had not - and recorded conversations intended to be private.

They alleged the recordings were then sent to advertisers for the purpose of creating targeted advertising.

Class action

The proposed settlement was filed on Friday in a California federal court, and requires approval by US District Judge Beth Labson Freeman.

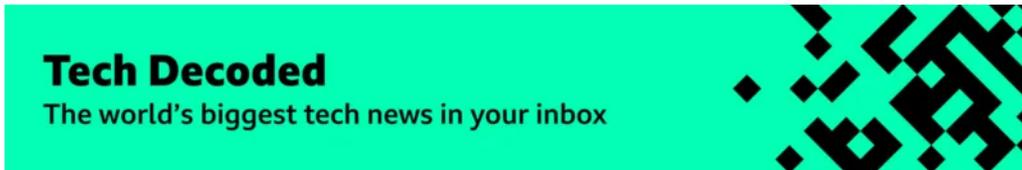
The claim has been brought as a class action lawsuit rather than an individual case - meaning if it is approved, the money will be paid out across many different claimants.

Those eligible for a payout will have owned Google devices dating back to May 2016.

But lawyers for the plaintiffs may ask for up to one-third of the settlement - amounting to about \$22m in legal fees.

It follows **a similar case in January** where Apple agreed to pay \$95m to settle a case alleging some of its devices were listening to people through its voice-activated assistant Siri without their permission.

The tech firm also denied any wrongdoing, as well as claims that it "recorded, disclosed to third parties, or failed to delete, conversations recorded as the result of a Siri activation" without consent.



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