



November 18, 2013

MADIGAN ANNOUNCES \$17 MILLION SETTLEMENT WITH GOOGLE

Google Settles Claims with Attorneys General Over Tracking Consumers' Surfing Habits

Chicago — Attorney General Lisa Madigan today joined with 37 other attorneys general to announce a \$17 million settlement with Google Inc. to resolve claims that it circumvented privacy settings on Apple Safari browsers enabling advertisers to gather information and track users' surfing habits.

The settlement addressed allegations by Madigan and the attorneys general that in 2011 and 2012 Google evaded default privacy settings on Apple's Safari web browsers, which were set to automatically block all third-party cookies on behalf of users. If cookies are enabled, it allows advertisers and any third party to monitor and track a user's web surfing habits. Despite Google's stated policy that cookies were blocked by default on Safari browsers, Google took active steps to circumvent those privacy settings and enable cookies on Safari browsers without users' knowledge or consent.

"Google was actively tracking users' web traffic without their authorization," Madigan said. "This settlement will ensure that Google restricts its data collection practices and provides better information to users about how to manage their browser settings."

As the operator of the most popular free search engine on the Internet, Google generates revenue primarily through advertising. Through its DoubleClick advertising platform, Google sets third-party cookies—small files set in users' web browsers—that enable it to gather information about those users, including, depending on the type of cookie, their web surfing habits. Apple's Safari browser is set by default to block third-party cookies, including cookies set by DoubleClick to track a user's browsing history. From June 1, 2011 until Feb. 15, 2012, Google altered its DoubleClick coding to circumvent those default privacy settings on Safari, without users' knowledge or consent, enabling Google to set DoubleClick cookies on users' Safari web browsers. Google disabled this coding method in February 2012 after the practice was widely reported.

Madigan and the attorneys general alleged Google's practices violated state consumer protection laws and related computer privacy laws. Under the settlement, Google has agreed to injunctive relief that requires it to do the following:

- Not deploy code to override a browser's cookie blocking settings without the user's consent unless it is necessary to detect, prevent or otherwise address fraud, security or technical issues.
- Not mislead users about how they can use any particular Google product, service or tool to directly manage how Google provides advertisements to their browsers.
- Improve the information it provides to users regarding cookies, their purposes and how they can be managed when using Google's products or services and tools.
- Maintain systems designed to ensure the expiration of the third-party cookies set on Safari web browsers while their default settings had been circumvented.

Joining Madigan in today's settlement were attorneys general from: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin.

Assistant Attorney General Matthew Van Hise handled the case for Madigan's Consumer Fraud Bureau.

[Return to November 2013 Press Releases](#)

