

Google Privacy Settlement: Lawyers Rewarded, Consumers Empty-Handed



A recent U.S. court decision has greenlit a \$62 million settlement in a consumer privacy lawsuit against Google. However, objections have surfaced as the settlement allocates \$18 million to plaintiff attorneys and \$42 million to advocacy groups, leaving no compensation for class members.

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Settlement Approval and Terms

U.S. District Judge Edward Davila approved the settlement, addressing objections in a 31-page order. The lawsuit, spanning five years, alleged Google's unlawful tracking and storage of location data from 247.7 million U.S. mobile users who disabled "location history" on their devices. Despite denying the claims, Google agreed to the settlement, committing to privacy practice changes for at least three years.

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Cy Pres Controversy

The approved settlement employs a "cy pres" distribution, directing funds to independent groups for class members' benefit rather than directly compensating them. Judge Davila defended this decision, citing impracticality in distributing monetary awards due to the vast number of Google users involved.

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Criticisms and Future Challenges

While Davila deemed the settlement fair and reasonable, challenges loom ahead. Theodore Frank, leading a challenge to the deal, vows to appeal, aiming to secure compensation for class members. The settlement's recipients include prominent advocacy groups like the Electronic Frontier Foundation and ACLU, tasked with providing transparent reports on fund utilization.

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Conclusion

Despite objections, the settlement signifies a significant legal outcome, with Google committing to impactful privacy reforms. The case underscores ongoing debates over cy pres distributions and the balance between legal redress and systemic change in consumer privacy disputes.

Case Reference: In re: Google location history litigation, U.S. District Court, Northern District of California, 5:18-cv-05062.