



Formerly The Foundation for Taxpayer & Consumer Rights

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November 17, 2008

WARNING: Google's Software & Services Threaten Your Office's Privacy

Honorable Barbara Boxer
United States Senator
112 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Boxer,

We write to warn you and your staff about the privacy and security risks of Google's products and software following recent presentations made by Google to Capitol Hill staffers urging use of the company's services. Google's powerpoint presentation to hill staff can be viewed at http://services.google.com/ppt/Google101_HillStaff_public.ppt

For example, if your staff uses Gmail (Google's email program), Google will open their email and store sensitive government data on Google's servers. Moreover, information transmitted over Gmail and through other Google services that utilize "auto-save" functions can be read by anyone monitoring the communications between Congress and Google's servers. Consumer Watchdog has prepared a new online video to explain the privacy problems with Gmail and the "auto-save" functions of other Google applications. The video can be viewed at <http://www.consumerwatchdog.org/google>

Your staff should be aware that sensitive communications and documents created with Google's software can be intercepted and read. Google's software and services are security risks because, often unbeknownst to the user, information is stored on Google's servers, not the computer user's desktop. As our latest video shows, Google intentionally blurs the distinction between secure desktop and un-secure Internet use.

Even if you trust Google's servers to store sensitive government data, any one monitoring the transmission of that data between your staff's computer and Google can read the contents of their email and their documents.

Consumer Watchdog has urged Google to take steps to better protect our privacy, but the company has yet to respond. Until it does, we urge you to caution your staff about the privacy problems at Google. (A previous video also posted at <http://www.consumerwatchdog.org/google> warns of the privacy

dangers of Google's new browser Chrome and the unnoticed conversation search engine users are having with Google.)

Thanks for your attention and concern.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jamie".

Jamie Court
President, Consumer Watchdog