

Privacy gets top billing in Firefox moves

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Tech watchers were discussing Mozilla this week over its new moves,

new plans, new Firefox features.

Ample attention was given, for one, regarding a decision to remove four extensions. Anthony Spadafora in [TechRadar](#) said Mozilla promptly marched to the beat of quelling snooping concerns in its removal of four Firefox extensions by Avast and subsidiary AVG.

Mozilla removed Avast Online Security, AVG Online Security, Avast SafePrice and AVG SafePrice.

It is with irony that one can trace an [article](#) from *TechRepublic* in July last year in its well-intentioned innocence which said that "If you use the Firefox browser, you might want to include a handy extension from Avast that helps protect you from phishing and malware sites." The article went on to say that "This little extension by Avast will go a long way toward protecting your Firefox web browsing experience."

The key personality behind the recent research that led to the removals is Adblock Plus' creator Wladimir Palant. He sent his report to Mozilla.

Why was Palant concerned? Avast Online Security and AVG Online Security were both considered ways to get warning signs of suspicious sites. Palant found that they were both collecting additional data including user browsing history.

Collecting a user's browsing history is prohibited by Mozilla, said *TechRadar*.

Avast SafePrice and AVG SafePrice showed deals and compared prices. Palant revealed that the Avast SafePrice and AVG SafePrice extensions were also collecting unnecessary data.

Catalin Cimpanu, *ZDNet* security reporter, [discussed](#) reactions from

Avast and its subsidiary AVG. *ZDNet* was told they were working with Mozilla to resolve the issue.

How did Avast explain the collection of user URLs? An Avast spokesperson, said Cimpanu, talked about the Online Security extension, saying "It is necessary for this service to collect the URL history to deliver its expected functionality. Avast does this without collecting or storing a user's identification."

Furthermore, Avast had already implemented some of Mozilla's requirements, according to the response, and intended to release further updated versions. The versions would be "fully compliant and transparent per the new requirements," and were to be available in the near future on the Mozilla store.

There was also a question about Google in the extensions issue, and stories on the matter pointed to Palant's [blog](#) posting on Dec. 3. What will Google do?

Palant had reported on the four extensions to Mozilla and to Opera and also to Google. Mozilla promptly disabled the extension listings; Opera likewise unpublished the extensions from its store.

And what about Google? As of [Palent](#)'s post on Dec. 3, Google had not removed the extensions.

With his last article on Dec. 4, Martin Brinkmann in *ghacks.net* also [reported](#) that "The extensions are still available for Google Chrome at the time of writing."

Pierluigi Paganini on [Dec. 4](#) also reported in *Security Affairs* that the extensions were still available on the Google Chrome Store.

Cimpanu in *ZDNet* said Google was expected to remove the four, however. Cimpanu's reasoning: "the browser maker has historically cracked down on extensions that collect user browsing records."

Meanwhile, Mozilla made news this week for more reasons than just extensions. Tech watchers also talked about its Firefox Private Network (FPN). This will allow users to encrypt Firefox connections.

The news is that it is in an extended beta. [TechCrunch](#) said this followed a few months of testing in the Firefox Test Pilot program. Not everyone can jump in. *TechCrunch* said the beta was available to users in the U.S. and time to spend on it was limited. The service was restricted to 12 hours of encrypted surfing on Firefox's desktop version. A Firefox account would be needed to use the [extension](#).

Firefox users can expect to have a more fully-featured device-level VPN service for encrypting surfing and app usage across Windows 10 devices with other platforms coming too, said *ExtremeTech*. This new service is accepting invitations.

Ryan Whitwam in [ExtremeTech](#): "You can sign up to be notified when Mozilla launches the full Firefox Private Network service. If you're worried about who to trust in the VPN world, Mozilla seems like a safe bet." There will be an introductory price per month.

The next news about Firefox especially drew notes of praise and gratitude from tech-watching sites. In the latest update to the browser, Mozilla is introducing picture-in-picture mode for videos.

From the [Dec. 3](#) Mozilla blog came the announcement that Picture-in-Picture was available with the new Firefox browser release.

"Picture-in-Picture allows a video to be contained in a separate and small

window, and still be viewable whether you switch from tab-to-tab or outside the Firefox browser. To see if Picture-in-Picture is available to you, hover your mouse over the video to see a small blue "Picture in Picture" option. Once you click the option, the video will pop into its own and will always stay as the top window, allowing you to continue to watch the video even if you switch tabs."

Picture-in-Picture is available on Windows OS but the blog said that it will be on MacOS and Linux in the next browser release in January.

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