

Amazon to pay \$31 million in privacy violation penalties for Alexa voice assistant and Ring camera

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Ernie Field pushes the doorbell on his Ring doorbell camera, July 16, 2019, at his home in Wolcott, Conn. In a vote Wednesday, May 31, 2023, the Federal Trade Commission is ordering Amazon to pay more than \$30 million in fines over privacy violations involving its voice assistant Alexa and its doorbell camera Ring. Credit: AP Photo/Jessica Hill, File

Amazon agreed Wednesday to pay a \$25 million civil penalty to settle Federal Trade Commission allegations it violated a child privacy law and deceived parents by keeping for years kids' voice and location data recorded by its popular Alexa voice assistant.

Separately, the company agreed to pay \$5.8 million in customer refunds for alleged privacy violations involving its doorbell camera Ring.

[The Alexa-related action](#) orders Amazon to overhaul its data deletion practices and impose stricter, more transparent privacy measures. It also obliges the tech giant to delete certain data collected by its internet-connected digital assistant, which people use for everything from checking the weather to playing games and queueing up music.

"Amazon's history of misleading parents, keeping children's recordings indefinitely, and flouting parents' deletion requests violated COPPA (the Child Online Privacy Protection Act) and sacrificed privacy for profits," Samuel Levine, the FTC consumer protection chief, said in a statement. The 1998 law is designed to shield children from online harms.

FTC Commissioner Alvaro Bedoya said in a statement that "when parents asked Amazon to delete their kids' Alexa voice data, the company did not delete all of it."

The agency ordered the company to delete inactive child accounts as well as certain voice and geolocation data.

Amazon kept the kids' data to refine its voice recognition algorithm, the artificial intelligence behind Alexa, which powers Echo and other smart speakers, Bedoya said. The FTC complaint sends a message to all tech companies who are "sprinting to do the same" amid fierce competition in developing AI datasets, he added.

"Nothing is more visceral to a parent than the sound of their child's voice," tweeted Bedoya, the father of two small children.



Amazon Echo and Echo Plus devices, behind, sit near illuminated Echo Button devices during an event by the company in Seattle, Sept. 27, 2017. In a vote Wednesday, May 31, 2023, the Federal Trade Commission is ordering Amazon to pay more than \$30 million in fines over privacy violations involving its voice assistant Alexa and its doorbell camera Ring. Credit: AP Photo/Elaine Thompson, File

Amazon said last month that it has sold more than a [half-billion Alexa-enabled devices globally](#) and that use of the service increased 35% last year.

In the Ring case, the FTC says Amazon's home security camera subsidiary let employees and contractors access consumers' private videos and providing lax security practices that enabled hackers to take control of some accounts.

Amazon bought California-based Ring in 2018, and many of the violations alleged by the FTC predate the acquisition. Under the FTC's order, Ring is required to pay \$5.8 million that would be used for consumer refunds.

Amazon said it disagreed with the FTC's claims on both Alexa and Ring and denied violating the law. But it said the settlements "put these matters behind us."

"Our devices and services are built to protect customers' privacy, and to provide customers with control over their experience," the Seattle-based company said.

In addition to the fine in the Alexa case, the proposed order prohibits Amazon from using deleted geolocation and voice information to create or improve any data product. The order also requires Amazon to create a privacy program for its use of geolocation information.

The proposed orders must be approved by federal judges.

FTC commissioners had unanimously voted to file the charges against Amazon in both cases.

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