

Timeout declared for Walkie-Talkie on Apple Watch

12 July 2019, by Nancy Cohen



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Pre-iEra, the idea of a Dick Tracy hiding in the corners of a skyscraper, talking to his wrist captured imaginations of children and adults everywhere. Apple did not let us forget. Its Walkie-Talkie app launched last year meant you could chat directly with other Apple Watch users via your wrist.

Walkie-Talkie however will have to take a walk and stop talking. Apple has said no to it as a live feature on its Apple Watch, where users could push a button and communicate instantly.

Why? Apple was made aware that there was a vulnerability enabling someone to listen in on another user's iPhone without consent. That two-way communication app was at least possibly able to fall victim to eavesdropping.

AppleInsider's Mikey Campbell: "Apple said it was made aware of the bug through its product security reporting [service](#), which allows developers, researchers and others to flag security and [privacy issues](#) via email."

Apple has disabled the feature until such time that it can release a fix.

TechCrunch had the much-quoted story that captured the attention of other news sites. *TechCrunch* Editor-In-Chief Matthew Panzarino posted Apple's statement.

"We were just made [aware](#) of a vulnerability related to the Walkie-Talkie app on the Apple Watch and have disabled the function as we quickly fix the issue. We apologize to our customers for the inconvenience and will restore the functionality as soon as possible."

Apple promptly moved to disable the app and referred to the move as "the right course of action."

Apple said there was no sign currently that it was exploited and mentioned that "specific conditions and sequences of events" were required to exploit it.

As Apple said it would require a specific sequence of events to take place, Benjamin Mayo, *9to5Mac*, took that to suggest "it sounds like the [bug](#) was intricate and not something that would be stumbled on by accident."

What's next?

"The company is temporarily [disabling](#) the feature entirely until a fix can be made and rolled out to devices," said Panzarino. "The Walkie Talkie App will remain installed on devices, but will not function until it has been updated with the fix."

(*Gizmodo*, by the way, verified that while the Walkie-Talkie app remains on the Apple Watch, attempts to chat with friends or invite friends to [chat](#) were not working, according to Victoria Song on Thursday.)

Ars Technica's Dan Goodin described what the app does for Apple's watch users: "The Walkie-Talkie

app allows people who accept an [invitation](#) to talk with friends in [real-time](#) without the hassle of making a phone call. Parties press a button when speaking and release it to hear what the other party says. Apple introduced the feature last year as part of its WatchOS 5 update."

In June last year, Dieter Bohn in *The Verge* described what he saw in a new app, Walkie-Talkie, which "lets you send and receive [quick](#) voice messages with friends and family."

He walked his readers through how it works. "You and your friend agree to become Walkie-Talkie buddies (my term, not Apple's). One of you asks to start a Walkie-Talkie chat, and then the other agrees to be your pal. You open Walkie-Talkie and then tap a button to send a message...Once the call is connected, your friend hears a chime and then the message you sent. They can then tap a button on their watchface to reply instantly. Their reply is sent to you instantly, and you can then reply by tapping a button yourself."

Bohn was impressed in how it "ensures a real-time communication feeling to Walkie-Talkie chats. It's way simpler than previous cellular PTT solutions...And because it's based on Apple's own FaceTime instead of cellular numbers, it works equally well over Wi-Fi and cellular."

Apple can be praised for quickly translating the alert into action to protect customers. In the bigger picture, when so much scrutiny is placed on how major vendors treat user privacy, though, it comes as no surprise that Apple reacted promptly. Sebastian Herrera, a reporter at *The Wall Street Journal*, remarked that "[Big](#) technology companies are facing heightened scrutiny of their data-privacy practices and their market power."

More information:

support.apple.com/en-us/HT201220

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