

SKoreans sue Apple over iPhone user information

KELLY OLSEN - AP Business Writer - Associated Press

A group of nearly 27,000 South Koreans is suing Apple for \$26 million for what they claim are privacy violations from the collection of iPhone user location information.

Each person in the suit is seeking 1 million won (\$932) in damages, Kim Hyeong-seok, one of their attorneys, said Wednesday. He said they are targeting Apple Inc. and its South Korean unit to "protect privacy" rights.

Apple spokesman Steve Park in Seoul declined to comment.

Apple has faced complaints and criticisms since it said in April that its iPhones were storing locations of nearby cellphone towers and Wi-Fi hot spots for up to a year. Such data can be used to create a rough map of the device owner's movements.

Apple also revealed that a software bug caused iPhones to continue to send anonymous location data to the company's servers even when location services on the device were turned off.

The company has said it will no longer store the data on phones for more than seven days, will encrypt the data and will stop backing up the files to user computers. It also has fixed the bug with a free software update.

Kim, the lawyer, took Apple to court earlier this year over iPhone privacy and was awarded 1 million won.

He said he expected the first hearing in the new case to take place in October or November.

If the court in the southern city of Changwon rules in favor of the plaintiffs, the total award would come to about 27.6 billion won (\$25.7 million). Cupertino, California-based Apple — the most valuable company in the United States — earned \$7.31 billion in its fiscal third quarter.

Kim said that decision to seek damages of only 1 million per person reflects that South Korean courts do not generally award amounts as high as their counterparts in the United States.

He said 26,691 plaintiffs were listed in the civil suit filed Wednesday. Another 921 are minors and lawyers need to obtain the consent of their parents before they can join, Kim said. He expects that to take about two weeks.

South Korea's communications regulator earlier this month ordered Apple's local operation to pay a 3 million won fine for what it said were violations of the country's location information laws.

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