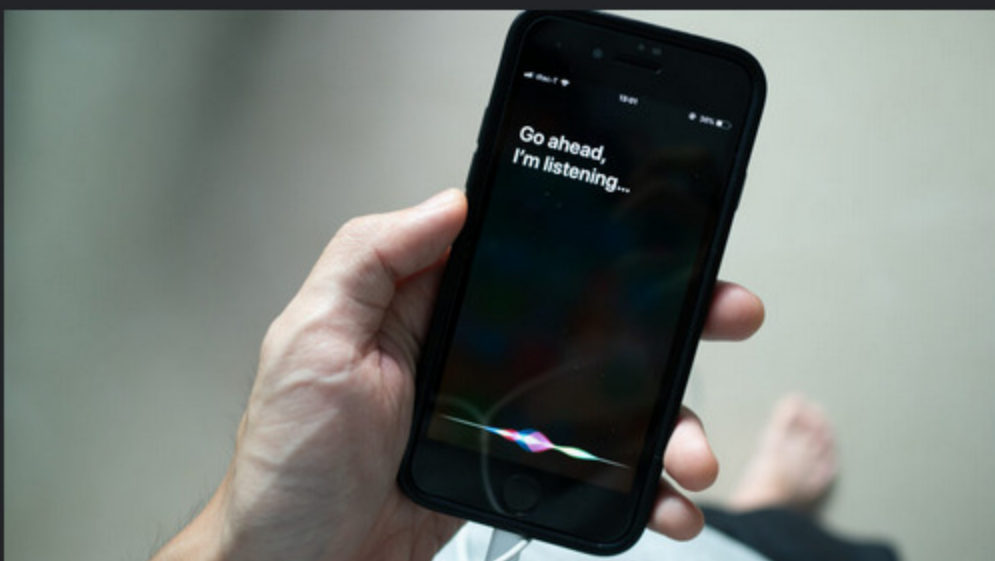


Siri “unintentionally” recorded private convos; Apple agrees to pay \$95M

Apple users may get \$20 each for up to five Siri-enabled devices.

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Apple has agreed to pay \$95 million to settle a lawsuit alleging that its voice assistant Siri routinely recorded private conversations that were then shared with third parties and used for targeted ads.

In the proposed class-action settlement—which comes after five years of litigation—Apple admitted to no wrongdoing. Instead, the settlement refers to “unintentional” Siri activations that occurred after the “Hey, Siri” feature was introduced in 2014, where recordings were apparently prompted without users ever saying the trigger words, “Hey, Siri.”

Sometimes Siri would be inadvertently activated, a whistleblower told The Guardian, when an Apple Watch was raised and speech was detected. The only clue that users seemingly had of Siri’s alleged spying was eerily accurate targeted ads that appeared after they had just been talking about specific items like Air Jordans or brands like Olive Garden, Reuters [noted](#) (claims which remain disputed).

“Siri has been engineered to protect user privacy from the beginning,” Apple’s spokesperson told Ars. “Siri data has never been used to build marketing profiles and it has never been sold to anyone for any purpose. Apple settled this case to avoid additional litigation so we can move forward from concerns about third-party grading that we already addressed in 2019. We use Siri data to improve Siri, and we are constantly developing technologies to make Siri even more private.”

Additionally, in 2019, Apple made changes to beef up Siri privacy, including defaulting to never retain audio recordings from Siri interactions.

It’s currently unknown how many customers were affected, but if the settlement is approved, the tech giant has offered up to \$20 per Siri-enabled device for any customers who made purchases between September 17, 2014, and December 31, 2024. That includes iPhones, iPads, Apple Watches, MacBooks, HomePods, iPod touches, and Apple TVs, the settlement agreement noted. Each customer can submit claims for up to five devices.

A hearing when the settlement could be approved is currently scheduled for February 14. If the settlement is certified, Apple will send notices to all affected customers. Through the settlement, customers can not only get monetary relief but also ensure that their private phone calls are permanently deleted.

While the settlement appears to be a victory for Apple users after months of mediation, it potentially lets Apple off the hook pretty cheaply. If the court had certified the class action and Apple users had won, Apple could’ve been fined more than \$1.5 billion under the Wiretap Act alone, court filings showed.

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But lawyers representing Apple users decided to settle, partly because data privacy law is still a “developing area of law imposing inherent risks that a new decision could shift the legal landscape as to the certifiability of a class, liability, and damages,” the motion to approve the settlement agreement said. It was also possible that the class size could be significantly narrowed through ongoing litigation, if the court determined that Apple users had to prove their calls had been recorded through an incidental Siri activation—potentially reducing recoverable damages for everyone.

“The percentage of those who experienced an unintended Siri activation is not known,” the motion said. “Although it is difficult to estimate what a jury would award, and what claims or class(es) would proceed to trial, the Settlement reflects approximately 10–15 percent of Plaintiffs expected recoverable damages.”

Siri’s unintentional recordings were initially exposed by The Guardian in 2019, plaintiffs’ complaint said. That’s when a whistleblower alleged that “there have been countless instances of recordings featuring private discussions between doctors and patients, business deals, seemingly criminal dealings, sexual encounters and so on. These recordings are accompanied by user data showing location, contact details, and app data.”

Horrified Apple users sued, considering each recording “an egregious breach of social norms” that seemed to violate state and federal laws. They alleged that Apple’s conduct was deliberate, arguing Apple commercially benefited from the secret recordings.

Apple repeatedly moved to dismiss the suit, arguing that “there are no facts, much less plausible facts, that tie Plaintiffs’ receipt of targeted ads to their speculation that Siri must have been listening to their conversations, and Apple must have used Siri to facilitate targeted ads by third parties.”

Through the settlement agreement, Apple ultimately agreed that Siri unintentionally recorded private conversations and is likely hoping the settlement will finally end the controversy for good.

Meanwhile, Google faces a similar lawsuit in the same district from plaintiffs represented by the same firms over its voice assistant, Reuters noted. A win in that suit could affect anyone who purchased “Google’s own smart home speakers, Google Home, Home Mini, and Home Max; smart displays, Google Nest Hub, and Nest Hub Max; and its Pixel smartphones” from approximately May 18, 2016 to today, a December [court filing](#) noted. That litigation likely won’t be settled until this fall.

This story was updated on January 5 to include comments from Apple.



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