Privacy regulators study finds Internet of Things shortfalls

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Six in ten Internet of Things devices don't properly tell customers how their personal information is being used, an international study has found.

The study, by 25 data protection regulators around the world (including Estonian Data Protection Inspectorate), looked at devices like smart electricity meters, internet-connected thermostats and watches that monitor health, considering how well companies communicate privacy matters to their customers.

The report showed:

- 59 per cent of devices failed to adequately explain to customers how their personal information was collected, used and disclosed;
- 68 per cent failed to properly explain how information was stored;
- 72 per cent failed to explain how customers could delete their information off the device, and
- 38 per cent failed to include easily identifiable contact details if customers had privacy concerns.

Concerns were also raised around medical devices that sent reports back to GPs via unencrypted email.

The data protection authorities looked at more than 300 devices. Authorities will now consider action against any devices or services thought to have been breaking data protection laws.

The work was coordinated by the Global Privacy Enforcement Network, and follows previous reports on online services for children, website privacy policies and mobile phone apps.

The action is being led by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) in the UK. Steve Eckersley, ICO Head of Enforcement, said: "This technology can improve our homes, our health and our happiness. But that shouldn't be at the cost of our privacy. Companies making these devices need to be clear how they're protecting customers. We would encourage companies to properly consider the privacy impact on individuals before they go to market with their product and services. If consumers are nervous that devices aren't using their data safely and sensibly, then they won't use them."

"By looking at this internationally, we've been able to get an excellent overview on this topic. We'll now be building on that, working with the industry and looking specifically at companies who might not have done enough to comply with the law."

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