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Internet surveillance program, citing what it described as a First Amendment right to divulge how many requests it receives from the government for data about its customers in the name of national security.

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No knowledge: While not specifically denying it shared user information with the government, internet giant Google said that it had never heard of the PRISM scheme before reports broke this week

WASHINGTON (AP) — Google on Tuesday sharply challenged the federal government's gag order on its Internet surveillance program, citing what it described as a First Amendment right to divulge how many requests it receives from the government for data about its customers in the name of national security.

The move came in a legal motion filed in the secretive Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court and was aimed at mending Google's reputation after it was identified this month as one of nine U.S. Internet companies that gave the National Security Agency access to data on its customers. Revelations about the program,

known as PRISM, by a former NSA contractor has cracked open a broader debate

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reports in the media, and Google's users are concerned by the allegations," according to the company's motion. "Google must respond to such claims with more than generalities."

Google has previously disclosed the number of data requests it receives from civilian law enforcement.

A company statement Tuesday said that "lumping national security requests together with criminal requests — as some companies have been permitted to do — would be a backward step for our users."

Alex Abdo, an attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union, said all the technology companies should be allowed to release as many details as possible, and that the government should divulge its legal justification of the surveillance program.

"The public has a right to know more about the government's sweeping surveillance programs so that it can judge for itself whether they are necessary and legal," Abdo said in a statement.

Few comments have been made from left or right media as of yet. Including Alex Jones, of InfoWars.com.

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