



April 2, 2007

Representative Brad Miller
Chairman
Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight
House Committee on Science and Technology
2320 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for your letter to Eric Schmidt about press reports regarding satellite imagery of New Orleans in Google Maps and Google Earth. On behalf of Eric and everyone at Google, I'd like to provide some background information and an update on our New Orleans imagery. In addition to this letter, we will be pleased to meet with your staff as soon as possible.

Google employees were deeply affected by the human suffering caused by Hurricane Katrina. In 2005, in the days following Katrina's devastating hit on New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, a very motivated group of volunteers at Google worked around the clock with NOAA, NASA, and others to acquire, format, and post updated imagery of the affected areas as quickly as possible via Google Maps and Google Earth.

Not only did Google Earth tools help locate and rescue thousands of survivors in areas where street signs and traffic signals had been wiped out, it allowed aid agencies to identify unaffected areas for the distribution of relief supplies. Furthermore, the images allowed displaced hurricane survivors in remote shelters to decide whether to return to their homes or accept emergency housing elsewhere. In July 2006 we were honored to receive the "Hurricane Katrina Recognition Award" from the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency in recognition of our Katrina-related efforts.

Google Maps and Google Earth are routinely and continuously updated with better-resolution imagery from our third-party data providers in an effort to give our users the highest-quality imagery possible. Our goal is to create a global earth database of the best quality – and "quality" embraces a range of factors such as timeliness, resolution, cloud cover, light conditions, and color balancing.

In September 2006, the storm imagery of New Orleans was replaced with pre-Katrina aerial photography of significantly higher resolution as part of our regular series of global data enhancements. At the same time, we continued to make available the post-Katrina

imagery, and associated overlays such as damage assessments and Red Cross shelters, on a dedicated site (<http://earth.google.com/katrina.html>).

While the imagery changes that affected New Orleans happened many months ago, we appreciate the increasingly important role that Google imagery is coming to play in the public discourse, and recognize how significant such changes can be to New Orleans residents, Google users, and others.

As a result, our engineering team worked through the weekend to process post-Katrina imagery from 2006 for the Gulf Coast area that is equal in resolution to the data it is replacing. That new data was published in Google Earth and Google Maps yesterday evening, April 1. We believe this update shows Google's commitment to producing a high quality experience for our users, while also being responsive to public concerns.

I want to assure you that the use of pre-Katrina imagery was the result of our continuous efforts to provide the highest-quality imagery possible, and not an effort to rewrite history, as has been suggested. I also want to make clear that the Google executives responsible for our Earth and Maps products were not asked by any governmental entity to modify our imagery of New Orleans.

Thank you again for your letter. Like all Americans, Google employees were touched by Hurricane Katrina and have great admiration for the residents of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast as they rebuild the region. We look forward to meeting with you and your staff to discuss this issue in further detail.

Sincerely,



Alan Davidson
Senior Policy Counsel
Google

Cc: Representative James Sensenbrenner, Jr.
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight