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Amazon Smart Devices Share Your Internet Connection with Your Neighbors

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I know several people who refuse to buy a smart speaker because they fear it will “listen in” on their supper–table discussions, their side of phone conversations, and even their interactions with their family pets.

The New York Time’s website that has garnered praise for its accurate testing on everything from ponchos to microwave ovens, addresses the issue with the headline, Amazon Sidewalk Will Share Your Internet With Strangers. It’s Not As Scary As It Sounds. The [Wirecutter](https://www.nytimes.com/wirecutter/blog/amazon-sidewalk-review/) says you need to know four points:

* You can turn off Sidewalk at any time.

Now, news reports may seal the deal and reinforce their objections so they will never invite a smart speaker into their homes.

These reports have to do with Amazon smart devices. In June, the company launched a program called Amazon Sidewalk.

It requires owners of many Amazon Echo smart speakers and Ring security cameras to automatically share a portion of their wireless Internet connection with their neighbors.

How do you stop this? The only way is for you to turn off Sidewalk.

You have to opt-out of the program. Amazon defends Sidewalk by saying it makes sure that its devices that are out of reach of a Wi-Fi connection keep operating.

The concept behind Sidewalk is to turn home Wi-Fi connections into a “mesh network” that can extend Internet coverage to areas that residential Wi-Fi can’t reach. Amazon’s Echo and Ring devices work in unison to create this network by taking a small portion of bandwidth from home Internet connections.

But news reports indicate some security experts are frowning. They say the technology is so new that potential risks to one’s security and privacy are unclear.

Connecticut’s attorney general even warned consumers that Amazon’s approach is “unchartered territory” and urged people to opt-out of Sidewalk unless they are absolutely sure their privacy and security will be protected.

Others praise the technology.

A computer science professor in France tells The Washington Post that Amazon’s network would make it easier and less expensive to use Internet-connected devices as long as the system is open and accessible.

* Compatible devices automatically will have Sidewalk enabled.
* Your involvement is totally optional.
* Your Internet Service Provider does not like Sidewalk and could flag you for using it.

The Wirecutter points out, “Crucially, you will never know who is sharing your signal (or when), and vice versa– your devices will never be able to tell which Sidewalk device you’re connected to when you leave home.”

The Wirecutter describes how a Tile tracker on a child’s backpack or dog collar may allow you to follow their path as they connect or disconnect from all of the Amazon Sidewalk–connected devices in your neighborhood.

Amazon says it alerted customers in emails last November and in May that Sidewalk was on its way.

If you’d like to disable or enable Sidewalk, Amazon provides instructions here. It says you can use the Alexa app to change the settings. (You cannot use your desktop Mac or PC to make the changes.)

I suspect Sidewalk will push folks who don’t trust smart speakers even further into the category of those who will never buy one of these gizmos. This is because they don’t trust them. They don’t favor them. They don’t want them in their homes. Period.

Read more about Sidewalk at [Tom’s Guide](https://www.tomsguide.com/reference/what-is-amazon-sidewalk), [PCMag](https://www.pcmag.com/how-to/what-is-amazon-sidewalk-and-how-do-you-disable-it), [TechHive](https://www.techhive.com/article/3599458/how-to-turn-off-amazon-sidewalk.html), [WIRED](https://www.wired.com/story/how-amazon-sidewalk-works/), and [C|net](https://www.cnet.com/home/smart-home/amazon-echo-shares-your-internet-with-the-neighbors-heres-how-to-turn-off-amazon-sidewalk/).

Let me add: We’re going to hear plenty more about Amazon Sidewalk. The discussion about the pros and cons of this technology has only just begun. Stay tuned.