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Web Stores Sued Over Data Leaks

By Khristina Narizhnaya

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An independent consumer rights watchdog has sued 10 of about 80 online stores whose customers' personal information became available last week on the Internet, hoping to set a precedent for further privacy breach lawsuits.

The Consumer Union of Russia wants the companies to admit that they broke the law by not preventing the leaks, which include the full names and addresses of clients, as well as passport details for some customers.

"This is all horrible and destructive and not right," the organization's head, Pyotr Shelishch, said at a news conference Monday. "We need to do something together to ensure that what we wish to keep private stays private."

Dozens of stores were affected by the leak, but the Federal Consumer Protection Service, which reported the figure of "around 80," has only provided Shelishch's organization with contact information for 10, he said.

The lawsuits, which include no monetary claims, aim not to punish the offenders but to pave the way for legal action by those whose privacy rights are violated, either in this case or in future incidents, Shelishch said.

The organization filed a similar lawsuit last month against the MegaFon mobile operator after a leak of about 8,000 text messages by its clients. A pretrial hearing is scheduled for next week.

The lawsuit mentions the search engines Yandex and Google, which carried the compromised data, but only as third parties not liable for the privacy breach.

No serious consequences have been reported after the leaks, but that doesn't mean that an unscrupulous person couldn't act, Shelishch said. For example, he said, information about purchased tickets could tip off a potential robber of when an apartment might be empty, and leaked text messages could stir fears of affairs among married couples.

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