FBI catches another man allegedly stealing Apple self-driving car secrets



Enlarge / Apple CEO Tim Cook speaks about the new Apple headquarters during a media event in Cupertino, California, on September 12, 2017.

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Last July, we reported that federal prosecutors had arrested a man for stealing secrets from Apple's self-driving car project and attempting to take them to a new job at a Chinese startup. This week, another man was arrested under very similar circumstances.

Apple hired Jizhong Chen last June to work on its self-driving car project, which employs around 1,200 people. According to a criminal complaint filed by the FBI, Chen began taking photographs of confidential Apple information almost immediately. A June 20 image found on Chen's personally owned computer showed "an Apple-designed wiring harness for an autonomous vehicle."

Apple didn't catch on to Chen's alleged espionage activities until January 11, when another Apple employee spotted him snapping pictures inside a secure Apple workspace. He thought that was suspicious and alerted Apple security. Apple investigators interviewed Chen and secured permission to examine his personally owned computer, hard drive, and smartphone.

They found "over two thousand files containing confidential and proprietary Apple material, including manuals, schematics, and diagrams." According to the FBI, "hundreds of the files on Chen's personally owned computer were photographs of computer screens with Apple information on the screen. Some of the photographs showed a laptop with the name "Jizhong" on a label near the screen."

Chen's phone contained 100 photographs taken inside the building where Apple's self-driving car project is located.

Apple also discovered that Chen had applied for two jobs outside Apple, including one at an autonomous vehicle company in China. Chen told Apple he was planning to travel to China to visit his ill father.

But before he could get on the airplane, he was arrested. A few days later he was released after posting $500,000 bail.

Apple isn't the only company fending off apparent attempts to steal its technology on behalf of Chinese companies. Earlier this week, US prosecutors indicted smartphone giant Huawei for stealing a robot arm designed by T-Mobile for testing

smartphones.

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