

Ikea fined £940,000 and found guilty of illegally spying on staff

The world's largest furniture maker was today found guilty of spying on employees, while its former chief executive Jean-Louis Baillot was handed a two-year sentence

BY

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Two former Ikea France executives were convicted and fined over the scheme and given suspended prison sentences (Image: ANP/AFP via Getty Images)

Ikea has been found guilty of illegally spying on its employees over a number of years and has been fined £946,000 by French authorities.

Two former Ikea France executives were convicted and fined over the scheme and given suspended prison sentences.

Among the other 13 defendants in the high-profile trial, some were acquitted and others given suspended sentences.

Judges at the Versailles court found that between 2009 and 2012, Ikea's French subsidiary paid for illegal access to police files to sift out trouble-making employees and to profile unsatisfied customers.

In one situation, Ikea France was accused of using unauthorised information to try to catch an employee who had claimed unemployment benefits but drove a Porsche.

In another alleged instance of illegal prying, the subsidiary reportedly investigated an employee's criminal record to determine how the employee was able to own a BMW on a low income.



Ikea France was convicted of receiving personal data obtained through fraudulent means (Image: AFP via Getty Images)

Ikea France was today ordered to pay almost £1million in penalties and about £85,000 in damages.

Trade unions accused Ikea France of collecting personal data by fraudulent means, notably via illegally obtained police files, and illicitly disclosing personal information.

Lawyers for Ikea France denied that the company had any strategy of "generalised espionage".

A lawyer for the unions, Solene Debarre, said: "One million euros isn't much for Ikea, but it's a symbol."

Prosecutor Pamela Tabardel asked the court to hand "an exemplary sentence and a strong message to all companies".

Paris was convicted of fraudulently gathering personal data, fined £8,600 and given an 18-month suspended sentence.

Baillet, who denied ordering up a spy operation, was convicted of receiving fraudulently collected data and complicity in the scheme.



He was fined £43,000 and given a two-year suspended sentence.

Another former CEO of Ikea France was acquitted for lack of evidence.

Ikea France's lawyer, Emmanuel Daoud, said the company had not decided whether to appeal.

He said the case was marked by a lack of hard evidence and holes, and noted that the fines were well below the maximum possible.

"The court took into account the action plan that Ikea put in place after the revelation of the facts, in 2012. That's very satisfying," Mr Daoud said.

The company fired four executives and changed internal policy after French prosecutors opened a criminal probe in 2012.

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Trade unions alleged that Ikea France paid to gain access to police files that had information about targeted individuals, particularly union activists and customers who were in disputes with Ikea.

The company also faces potential damages from separate civil lawsuits filed by unions and 74 employees.

Ikea's France subsidiary employs more than 10,000 people in 34 stores, an e-commerce site and a customer support centre.