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Let's plan for cyberterror just like other disasters

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Saturday February 7, 2015 5:00 AM

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As central Ohioans, we know we must constantly prepare for natural disasters such as storms and floods. Our government in Franklin County and law enforcement, educational and private institutions regularly run through our plans for dealing with both natural and man-made incidents, including acts of terrorism.

Now we're building a network to ensure that we provide the same levels of preparedness and protection against cyber incidents that could damage or destroy the vast amounts of personal and financial information stored in our homes as well as in our commercial, financial, educational and medical institutions.

An intrusion into the computer systems controlling utilities, financial information, emergency response and the health-care industry could result in a massive loss of vital services.

Franklin County Emergency Management and Homeland Security has taken the initiative to bring together key stakeholders from both private and public sectors to increase regional preparedness against such cyber threats.

I, along with Franklin County Commissioner Paula Brooks and Columbus City Councilman Zach Klein, co-chair this Central Ohio Cybersecurity Initiative Work Group.

We first met in October, with more than 60 participants from local, state and federal government, as well as business leaders from higher education and the utility and financial industries.

By spring, we plan to have a template for use in long-range planning for cyber preparedness.

The working group is exploring basic questions: What current capabilities exist for response to a cyber event? How should public agencies and private businesses measure their performance in combatting intrusions to their cyber systems? What is the best way to educate employees and citizens to recognize a cyber intrusion? And how do our information systems interconnect?

By studying best practices and using the expertise available to us, we can help plan for and respond to significant cyber events in order to limit their impact on the region.

Cybersecurity involves the whole community. While recent cyber attacks have targeted large international corporations, and the federal government generally has taken the lead in responding to them, our group believes we must build safeguards at the local level, as well.

As a co-chairman of the group, I thank the emergency-management agency for taking the lead on this important issue.

To learn more about our effort, visit the Franklin County Emergency Management and Homeland Security website, www.fcemhs.org.

Our businesses and public institutions are fundamentally connected in our communities, and a cyber threat to one of us is a threat to all of us.

JACK PARTRIDGE

Chief policy officer

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