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Utilities lack computer security plans

Energy companies view safety as a top priority, but just 65 percent of utilities have cyber security programs, according to responses to a consulting firm's survey. Results of the survey by consulting firm Black & Veatch, released Wednesday, showed that many utilities have no plans to adopt computer security measures.

The responses illustrate a disconnect between many energy companies' focus on physical safety and their knowledge of risks posed by increasingly automated systems that could be compromised.

"This level of automation helps drive efficiency, but it is important to recognize that each connected device also becomes a network access point subject to attack by hackers," said a Black & Veatch report on the survey results.

The consulting firm surveyed 336 energy companies associated with the natural gas industry, including producers, pipeline companies and electric utilities.

A quarter of utilities with more than 1 million customers said they did not have computer security programs in place, though some were in the process of developing plans, according to the report.

Two-thirds of utilities with fewer than 100,000 customers don't have security programs in place, and 44 percent don't plan to, the report said.

Energy companies faced more cyber attacks last year than any other industry, according to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Hackers can pose serious risks to energy operations, with the potential to infect systems and disrupt power service or cause generation equipment to malfunction and even self-destruct.

Although it would require sophisticated knowledge of a target facility, security experts warn that terrorist organizations or hostile nations could organize such an attack.

Attacks of lower sophistication could use malicious software to infect critical equipment and slow or shut it down. Utilities without security systems also could be vulnerable to hackers attempting to steal valuable data, such as customer information or intellectual property.

Electricity Pricing – Nov 5, 2013 Com Ed Average LMP Electric Price

Time Period	Average per Kwh
Oct, 2012	\$.02829
Nov, 2012	\$.03327
Dec, 2012	\$.03081
Jan, 2013	\$.03111
Feb, 2013	\$.03219
Mar, 2013	\$.03665
Apr, 2013	\$.03821
May, 2013	\$.03501
Jun, 2013	\$.03215
Jul, 2013	\$.04067
Aug, 2013	\$.03112
Sep, 2013	\$.03274
Oct 1 – Oct 31	\$.03183

Extended Temperature Forecast:

Chicago Area

	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
High	58	58	46	50	52
Low	41	41	37	43	42

