

Union: Hacker broke into FAA computers

Accessed the names, national ID numbers of 45,000 employees and retirees

By Joan Lowy

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WASHINGTON - Hackers broke into the Federal Aviation Administration's computer system last week, accessing the names and national identification numbers of 45,000 employees and retirees, a union leader says.

Tom Waters, president of American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Local 3290, said FAA officials briefed union leaders Monday about the security breach.

FAA spokeswoman Laura Brown confirmed the agency's computers were hacked last week.

Waters said union leaders were told hackers gained access to two files. One file had the names and Social Security numbers of 45,000 employees and retirees on the FAA's rolls as of February 2006. Social Security is the U.S. government-directed pension system, and in the absence of a national identity card, other people's social security numbers can be used to steal identities for illicit purposes.

Waters said the other file contained medical information that was encrypted.

"These government systems should be the best in the world, and apparently they are able to be compromised," said Waters, an FAA contracts attorney. "Our information technology systems people need to take a long hard look at themselves and their capabilities. This is malpractice in their world."

FAA officials told union leaders the incident was the first of its kind at the agency. But Waters said his union complained about three or four years ago about an incident in which employees received anti-union mail that used names and addresses that appeared to be generated from FAA computer files.

He said the union complained to the FAA and the Transportation Department's inspector general, but no action was taken.