

Federal Computer Week

Information-sharing platform hacked

- By [Ben Bain](#)
- May 13, 2009

Homeland Security Information Network suffers intrusions

The Homeland Security Department's platform for sharing sensitive but unclassified data with state and local authorities was hacked recently, a DHS official has confirmed.

The intrusion into the Homeland Security Information Network (HSIN) was confirmed to Federal Computer Week by Harry McDavid, the chief information officer for DHS' Office of Operations Coordination and Planning. McDavid said the U.S. Computer Emergency Readiness Team reported an intrusion into the system in late March. The initial hack was brief and limited, and it was followed by a more extensive hack in early April, McDavid said.

The hacker or hackers gained access to the data by getting into the HSIN account of a federal employee or contractor, McDavid said. The bulk of the data obtained was federal, but some state information was also accessed, he added, and the organizations that owned the data and Congress were notified of the intrusion.

The files that were accessed contained administrative data such as telephone numbers and e-mail addresses of state and federal employees. However, an investigation into the incidents has found that no Social Security numbers, driver's license numbers or financial data were obtained, McDavid said.

Because HSIN is a sensitive but unclassified network "no information can be posted on HSIN that would cause anything more than minor damage to the homeland security mission," he said, adding that none of the accessed files dealt with the operations of either federal or state agencies that use HSIN.

McDavid said he did not know of other successful hacks into the platform. He called the tactics used to gain access to the user account "very sophisticated." However, he said the amount of data accessed was relatively minor and that officials have been able to map exactly what files were accessed.

"We immediately put in place a package of mitigation actions," he said. "One of those actions was to install two-factor identification on certain accounts that would preclude this identical type of intrusion from occurring again."

Ongoing work to upgrade HSIN has allowed DHS to quickly deploy new security measures to prevent similar intrusions from occurring, McDavid said. DHS awarded a contract worth as much as \$62 million in May 2008 to upgrade HSIN to the HSIN Next Gen platform. Officials say HSIN Next Gen will better meet users' needs and improve security.

McDavid said DHS' investigation into the incident found that no latent malicious code or applications were left behind. In addition, he said that although an authorized account was used to gain access to the system, no HSIN users had been found to be at fault and officials are working on a report about the hack for Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano. The report is expected to be completed this summer, he said.

About the Author

Ben Bain is a reporter for Federal Computer Week.



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