



Top of the Week: Utilities are Taking Cyber Security Seriously

By Chris Posey, Online Editor

The North American Electric Reliability Council (NERC), having recognized potential threats to the energy infrastructure both virtual and material, established the critical infrastructure protection (CIP) program to address issues of online and network security within the power generation industry, as well as physical/structural challenges common to the industry.

NERC's "Approach to Action" includes a four-tier security model (avoidance, assurance, detection and recovery). Specific elements of NERC's *Approach* include

- identification of critical services and assets
- vulnerability assessments
- risk assessment and management
- recovery and restoration
- monitoring and updating
- information sharing, education and awareness

These purpose of these items is to address the eight NERC-CIP standards: critical cyber asset identification, security management controls, personnel and training, electronic security perimeter(s), physical security, systems security management, incident reporting and response planning and recovery plans for critical cyber assets. Utilities are to meet different levels of compliance through 2008 and 2009 into 2010.

Despite the compulsory nature of the program, Brian Ahern, president and CEO of Industrial Defender, a CIP-oriented service that provides utilities with a comprehensive cyber security response to CIP mandates, believes that NERC CIP standards are being well received by utilities. Ahern comments, "From a market perspective, it was certainly a much needed, well overdue initiative to really get the industry to begin taking action." He indicates that his company has seen a "positive and aggressive" position being taken on CIP mandates by the industry. "The bottom line is the industry has embraced the need. I think they've gotten a black eye, but they're taking action, and I would say that the objectives set out by NERC CIP of securing the nation's utility infrastructure are going to work," Ahern says.

Utilities are falling into line as the value of NERC CIP becomes readily apparent. Of course, the hefty fines for noncompliance are compelling utilities to adopt appropriate measures quickly. But based on experience thus far, infrastructure cyber security measures stemming from NERC CIP will continue to grow and evolve as new challenges perpetually arise.

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