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Black Hat: Smart Meter Worm Attack Planned

IOActive's Mike Davis intends to unleash a worm on a smart meter at the Black Hat security conference on Thursday.

By Thomas Claburn, [InformationWeek](#)

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[The smart grid](#), the emerging power distribution [infrastructure](#) upgrade, may not be the bright idea its name suggests. In the rush to modernize the way electricity moves, security appears to be an afterthought.

At [Black Hat](#) on Thursday, Mike Davis, a senior security consultant with [IOActive](#), plans to conduct a [worm](#) attack on a smart meter, a part of the smart grid that's being installed at consumers' homes around the country.

The worm, Davis claims, can [copy](#) itself from one smart meter to the next in a neighborhood, ultimately causing power outages and rendering the smart meter inoperable.

"Many of the security vulnerabilities we found are pretty frightening and most smart meters don't even use [encryption](#) or ask for [authentication](#) before carrying out sensitive functions like running [software](#) updates and severing customers from the power grid," said Davis in [a statement](#).

IOActive president and CEO Joshua Pennell [said much the same thing](#) in March when he testified before the Committee of Homeland Security and the Department of Homeland Security.

"Based on our research and the ability to easily introduce serious threats, IOActive believes that the relative security immaturity of the smart grid and AMI markets warrants the adoption of proven industry best practices including the requirement of independent third-party security assessments of all smart grid technologies that are being proposed for deployment in the nation's critical infrastructure," he said.

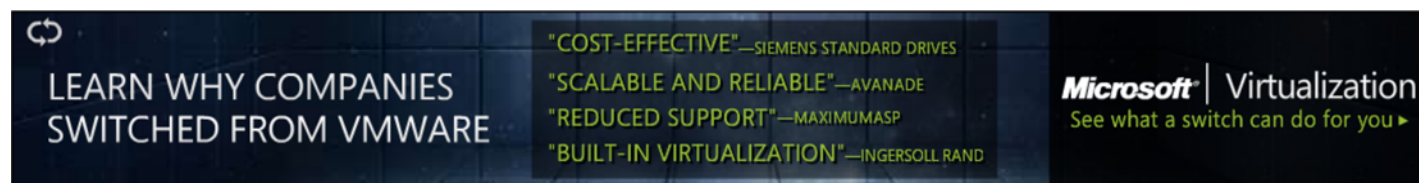
Last year, a CIA analyst revealed that "cyberattacks have been used to disrupt power equipment in several regions outside the United States." Such attacks have been rare due to the complexity and obscurity of the SCADA systems that govern electrical infrastructure. With the smart grid transition, the technical barriers to an attack of this sort are likely to be lower, at least initially.

Google and Microsoft are both developing smart meter services that aim to provide greater insight into home energy usage. [Google](#) has its [PowerMeter project](#), and Microsoft in June introduced Hohm.

Davis is scheduled to make his presentation on [Thursday, July 30 from 4:45-6:00 P.M.](#) in the Milano Ballroom at Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas, where Black Hat is being held.

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InformationWeek has published an in-depth report on Google's upcoming Chrome OS. [Download the report here](#) (registration required).



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