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# Central Ohio needs plan to guard it from cyber threats

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As Central Ohioans, we know we must constantly prepare for natural disasters such as storms and floods. Our government in Franklin County, law enforcement, educational and private institutions have developed and regularly exercise plans for dealing with natural and man-made incidents, including acts of terrorism.

We're now in the midst of building a strong network to assure that we provide the same levels of preparedness and protection against cyber incidents – attacks or events that could damage or destroy vast amounts of personal and financial information stored in our homes as well as in commercial, financial, educational and medical institutions.

According to the Franklin County Emergency Management and Homeland Security agency, cyber terrorism is one of the top five risks facing the county. An intrusion into the computer systems controlling utilities, financial information, emergency response and the health-care industry could result in a massive loss of vital services for much of Central Ohio and neighboring states for a prolonged period.

The county agency has taken the initiative to bring together key stakeholders from the private and public sectors to increase regional preparedness against such cyber threats. I, along with county Commissioner Paula Brooks and Columbus City Councilman [Zach Klein](#) co-chair the Central Ohio Cybersecurity Initiative Work Group.

When we first met in October, more than 60 participants from local, state and federal government, as well as leaders from higher education, utility and financial industries discussed the importance of increasing regional preparedness. The work group met recently to continue the discussion and outline goals and objectives. By spring, we plan to have a template for our partners to use in long-range planning for cyber preparedness.

The working group is exploring simple basic questions, such as what current capabilities exist for response to a cyber event? How should public agencies and private businesses measure their performance in combating intrusions to their cyber systems? What is the best way to educate employees and citizens to recognize a cyber intrusion? And how can the work group's members gain a better understanding of how our information systems interconnect?

We must balance the legal requirements to protect personal information with the public need to

share ways to protect that information.

By developing an understanding of best practices and using expertise available to us, we can help plan for and respond to significant cyber events in order to limit their impact on the region.

Cybersecurity involves the whole community. While recent cyber attacks have targeted large international corporations and the federal government has generally taken the lead in responding to them, our group believes we must build safeguards locally as well. These local efforts must embrace our unique cybersecurity challenges, tap area resources for education and awareness, protect our critical infrastructure, key resources and businesses and help communities safeguard citizens and customers from cyber attacks.

As a co-chairman of the Central Ohio Cybersecurity Initiative Work Group, I thank Franklin County Emergency Management and Homeland Security for taking the lead on this important issue. Learn more about our effort and keep track of what the group is doing through the county agency's Website at [www.fcemhs.org](http://www.fcemhs.org).

It is essential for the business community and public sector to forge relationships that protect all of our interests. Our businesses and public institutions are fundamentally connected in our communities and a cyber threat to one of us is a threat to all of us.

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