

March 20, 2020

## Cyber, Telecom Workers Seen as Critical During Pandemic

Data center operators and personnel who protect health care facilities and power companies from cyber attacks are among the workers who should remain on the job during the coronavirus pandemic, according to the Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA).

CISA's list of "essential critical infrastructure workers" is designed to advise state and local officials "as they work to protect their communities, while ensuring continuity of functions critical to public health and safety, as well as economic and national security," the agency said.

"The attached list identifies workers who conduct a range of operations and services that are essential to continued critical infrastructure viability, including staffing operations centers, maintaining and repairing critical infrastructure, operating call centers, working construction, and performing management functions, among others. The industries they support represent, but are not necessarily limited to, medical and healthcare, telecommunications, information technology systems, defense, food and agriculture, transportation and logistics, energy, water and wastewater, law enforcement, and public works," CISA said.

"As state and local communities consider COVID-19-related restrictions, CISA is offering this list to assist prioritizing activities related to continuity of operations and incident response, including the appropriate movement of critical infrastructure workers within and between jurisdictions. Accordingly, this list is advisory in nature. It is not, nor should it be considered to be, a federal directive or standard in and of itself," it added.

The list includes 911 call center employees, people who maintain communications infrastructure, "workers responding to cyber incidents involving critical infrastructure," and personnel who "maintain and operate central office, data centers, and other network office facilities."

"Workers across the information technology sector are playing a more essential role than ever in enabling critical infrastructure, helping businesses stay online, and keeping citizens connected," said John Miller, the Information Technology Industry Council's senior vice president-policy. "These workers are critical to supporting health care providers, manufacturing technology products and components, securing and servicing critical data centers, delivering food and essential needs to communities, keeping out-of-school students engaged, and enabling governments to respond to this global health crisis. Ongoing support of IT workers, including authorizing them to perform critical tech-based operations, during this time is critical."

Robert Mayer, USTelecom’s SVP-cybersecurity and innovation, said the U.S. was “relying on its communications infrastructure now more than ever. Today CISA took an important step to help maintain network preparedness, security, and resiliency in the midst of the COVID-19 public health crisis.”

“Here’s why this is important news: the employees managing the health and security of our networks work in operations centers and need to reach their workplace to do their jobs,” Mr. Mayer said. “In addition, some functions can only be handled in-person, so communications providers must keep critical store locations open to service first responder equipment like routers or provide publicly accessible Wi-Fi.” In a statement released today, FCC Commissioner Geoffrey Starks said, “In support of their public health efforts, states are implementing increasingly strict orders to stop non-essential business and keep residents at home. Both California and New York have, consistent with the guidance of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, identified telecommunications as essential infrastructure that must be supported even as other activities are restricted. I encourage all state and local officials to adopt this approach. Around the country, dedicated teams are working under challenging circumstances to expand access to communications networks. That critical work must continue as long as it can be done safely. For the tens of millions of Americans on the wrong side of the digital divide, gaining access to school, work, and medical care in this difficult time depends on those efforts.” —Tom Leithauser, [tom.leithauser@wolterskluwer.com](mailto:tom.leithauser@wolterskluwer.com)

*Copyright © 2020 CCH Incorporated, All Rights Reserved*