PERFORMANCE AUDIT

Work in progress: Audit description

Opportunities to Improve IT Security at Critical Infrastructure Organizations

Threats to critical infrastructure operations have grown more serious since the invasion of Ukraine early in 2022 and the heightened conflict in the Middle East in late 2023. The U.S. government's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) released warnings to state and local governments about the potential for cyberattacks. While not singling out specific targets, the warnings urgently recommended that state and local governments improve cybersecurity defenses around critical infrastructure. Examples of critical infrastructure sectors include water and waste-water, hospitals, communications, power stations and transportation.

In response to these threats, the State Auditor's Office has begun a new series of cybersecurity performance audits for governments with critical infrastructure in Washington. These audits are not intended to provide a comprehensive assessment of a government's security posture, but are instead narrowly scoped, looking for opportunities to improve those governments' security against external threats.

Preliminary scope, objectives and methodology

This audit will include the following three lines of work at several dozen local governments with critical infrastructure:

- Testing internet-facing assets, such as public websites, to identify vulnerabilities that an attacker anywhere in the world could leverage to attack or compromise IT systems.

- Assessing external-facing firewall configuration to identify potential areas for additional hardening, which could block or otherwise thwart an attack.

- Interviews with key IT management and staff focusing on the security controls protecting the IT systems used to manage critical infrastructure, resulting in tailored recommendations to improve IT security.

This performance audit will seek to answer the following question:

- Are there opportunities to strengthen the external security posture of selected governments with critical infrastructure?

Timing

Audit work will continue through 2025, with results provided to each government as we complete the audit. We will issue a public report covering audits completed by the end of each fiscal year.