

After cyberattack, much of county's business done on paper

By TOM FOREMAN JR. and JONATHAN DREW
Associated Press

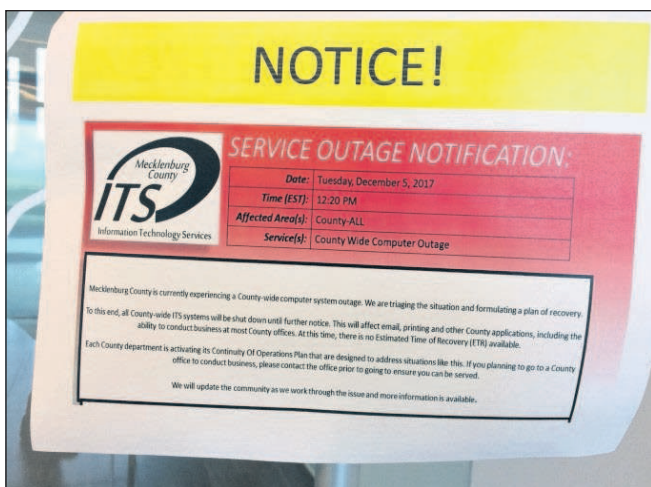
CHARLOTTE, N.C. — North Carolina's largest metro area was discovering just how hard it is to conduct business without county computers that handle numerous transactions on Thursday, a day after local leaders refused to pay hackers who froze their system.

Mecklenburg County computer systems that collect property taxes, handle building permits and process jail inmates were out of commission while technology workers made digital repairs with backed-up data. Officials say the fixes will take days.

County officials were also taking new precautions against fraudulent emails because hackers have launched a new attack in response to their refusal to pay ransom. No further damage to the system was reported.

In the meantime, a variety of transactions with county government were being done on paper.

Darryl Broome, a contractor who does remodeling and demolition work, went in person to



AP Photo/Tom Foreman Jr.

A sign warning the public of a computer outage is displayed at a Mecklenburg County county government office building Thursday in Charlotte, N.C.

a county office to retrieve land information he normally could look up on his home computer. He had to drive 10 miles and spent about a half-hour looking through paper records.

"It's a bit frustrating because you learn that you really need certain things online," he said. "You get used to doing certain things online, and when you have to slow down, it costs you time and time costs you money."

The county of more than 1 million residents includes Charlotte, but the city government said its separate computer system wasn't affected by the attack. Nor were the computers that handle 911 calls and dispatch for the city and county, said Charlotte Fire Department Deputy Chief Richard Granger.

Mecklenburg County manager Dena Diorio told staff in an email Thursday that the

county was disabling employees' ability to open attachments generated through Dropbox and Google Docs because of renewed attacks.

She said that because the county refused to pay ransom to unlock dozens of frozen servers, "the cyber criminals are redoubling their efforts to penetrate the county's systems, primarily through emails that contain fraudulent attachments with viruses that could further damage our systems."

Many county-run services have been delayed. The sheriff has said it's taking longer to manually process arrestees, as well as inmates due to be released.

Meanwhile, payments to the tax office must be made with a check, cash or money order, while code inspectors have been slowed down by having to use paper records, according to a list of affected services.

Cyberattacks on local government are becoming increasingly common and sophisticated. Security experts say Mecklenburg County followed the right steps before and after the cyberattack,

including declining to pay the ransom.

"Unfortunately, it's become all too common," said Lawrence Abrams, who runs the cyber security site bleeping-computer.com. "It's smart not to pay the ransom if you can avoid it. In paying these ransoms, it's obviously encouraging others."

Counties in Indiana and Alabama are among those that have paid to regain access to data frozen by cyberattacks since late last year. The Montgomery Advertiser reported that Montgomery County, Alabama, faced disruptions to some operations even after paying hackers in September.

Other public organizations have chosen to rebuild instead of paying hackers. In November 2016, a ransomware attack on San Francisco's transit system resulted in officials shutting down ticketing machines, allowing free rides for much of a weekend. But transit officials didn't pay a ransom. The St. Louis library system said it took days to restore electronic services for patrons and weeks more to fix all of its computers after it refused to pay hackers

behind a ransomware attack this year.

Ross Rustici, senior director of intelligence services at the firm Cybereason, said Mecklenburg County appears to have done a good job of backing up its data if it's able to restore the system without paying the hackers.

"It seems like the county was fairly well-prepared," he said. "Overall, this is not as bad of a story as it could have been."

Mecklenburg County revealed Tuesday that it was facing a computer outage after an employee opened an email attachment containing malicious software. Hackers had sought digital currency worth more than \$23,000 to unlock the data.

A forensic examination shows 48 of the county's 500 servers were affected, Diorio said, adding that county government officials believe the hacker wasn't able to gain access to individuals' health, credit card or Social Security information. Without getting the compromised servers unlocked, the county will have to rebuild significant parts of the system using the backup data.

COMMUNITY NOTES

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Warrenton Kiwanis Club — 1 p.m., Dooger's Seafood and Grill, 103 U.S. Highway 101, Warrenton. For information, call Darlene Warren at 503-861-2672.

Seaside Rebounders Stroke Support Group — 1 to 2 p.m., Providence Seaside Hospital Education Center, 725 S Wahanna Road, Seaside. Stroke survivors, their caregivers and family members welcome. For information, call 503-717-7781.

Sit & Stitch — 1 to 3 p.m., Homespun Quilts & Yarn, 108 10th St. Bring knitting, crochet or other needlework projects along to this community stitching time. All skill levels welcome.

Mahjong for Experienced Players — 1:15 p.m., Astoria Senior Center, 1111 Exchange St. For information, call 503-325-3231.

Beginner Line Dancing for Seniors — 1:30 to 3 p.m., Astoria Senior Center, 1111 Exchange St. For information, call 503-325-3231.

Warrenton Business Association — 5:30 p.m., commission chambers, Warrenton City Hall, 225 S. Main Ave. For information, call Kristin Talamantez at 503-861-9750.

Fat Quarter Quilters — 5:30 to 8 p.m., Homespun Quilts, 108 10th St. Not limited to quilts. For information, call 503-325-3300 or 800-298-3177 or go to <http://homespunquilt.com>

LGBTIQ Group — 6 p.m., Astoria Armory, 1636 Exchange St. Group is designed to help connect LGBTIQ people in Clatsop, Columbia, Tillamook and Pacific counties to discuss LGBTIQ issues freely and confidentially. For questions, contact Chris Wright at 425-314-3388.

Seaport Masonic Lodge No. 7 — 6:30 p.m. dinner, 7:30 p.m. meeting, 1572 Franklin Ave. All Masons and their guests are welcome.

THURSDAY

Chair Exercises for Seniors — 9 to 9:45 a.m., Astoria Senior Center, 1111 Exchange St. For information, call 503-325-3231.

Wickiup Senior Lunches — 11:30 a.m., Wickiup Grange Hall, 92683 Svensen Market Road. Free for those older than 60 (\$3 suggested donation), \$6.75 for those younger than age 60. For information, call Michelle Lewis at 503-861-4200.

Senior Lunch — 11:30 a.m., Bob Chisholm Senior Center, 1225 Avenue A, Seaside. Suggested donation of \$3 for those older than 60; \$6.75 for those younger than 60. For information, call Michelle Lewis at 503-861-4200.

Columbia Senior Diners — 11:30 a.m., 1111 Exchange St. The cost is \$6. For information, or to have a meal delivered, call 503-325-9693.

Warrenton Senior Lunch Program — noon, Warrenton Community Center, 170 S.W. Third St. Suggested donation of \$5 for seniors and \$7 for those younger than 60. For information, or to volunteer, call 503-861-3502 Monday or Thursday.

Seaside Rotary Club — noon, Outlet Mall, 1111 N. Roosevelt Drive, No. 206, Seaside. Lunch costs \$15. All are welcome. For information, go to <http://seasiderotary.com>

Survivors Circle — noon to 1 p.m., The Harbor, 1361 Duane St. Trauma Recovery and Empowerment Model Peer Support Group for survivors of intimate partner and sexual assault. Held in a safe confidential place to explore the

causes, effects and methods of healing from trauma; emphasis is on empowering survivors. For information, contact Shannon Symonds at 503-325-3426 ext. 106.

Astoria-Warrenton Duplicate Bridge Club — 12:30 to 4 p.m., Astoria Senior Center, 1111 Exchange St. Anyone may play if they have a partner; to request a bridge partner, call 503-325-0029.

Trivia — 6:30 p.m., Uptown Cafe, 1639 S.E. Ensign Lane, Warrenton. Teams of up to four players. Three \$2 games, winners take each pot. Rolling jackpot builds from week to week if no one answers jackpot question. For information, call 503-861-5639.

Jam Session — 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Astoria Senior Center, 1111 Exchange St. Open to the public. For information, call 503-325-3231.

FRIDAY

AAUW Walking Group — 9:30 a.m. Seaside Branch of American Association of University Women weekly low-impact group walk, followed by coffee and fellowship. For information, call 503-738-7751.

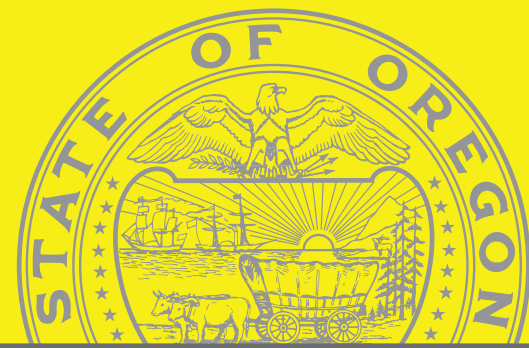
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Bingo — 7 p.m., Wickiup Senior Center, 92650 Svensen Market Road. For information call Mark Tischer at 503-458-6482.

Need help getting health insurance by the Dec. 15 deadline?

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