

Supporting Mental Health in Cybersecurity: Practical Tips for Co-ops

Summary

- Cybersecurity professionals play a crucial role in protecting critical infrastructure. The high-stress nature of this work can significantly impact mental health, leading to burnout, anxiety, and other mental health issues. Addressing these mental health risks is essential for both individual well-being and overall work effectiveness.
- The following advisory provides a summary of key points and considerations about the stress challenges related to cybersecurity and ways to promote good mental health.
- This advisory is primarily for co-op leadership and human resources professionals to recognize stresses on their cybersecurity staff and to learn about ways to help mitigate mental health challenges and provide support.

Key Factors Affecting Mental Health of Cybersecurity Professionals

High-Stress Environments

Cybersecurity is inherently high stress. Professionals face persistent threats from unknown actors that could disrupt operations, impact members, or compromise data – without knowing when or how an incident might occur. The pace is relentless, as new technologies expand the attack surface. In many co-ops, those responsible for cybersecurity juggle multiple roles, intensifying time and attention pressures. Events like hurricanes or widespread outages can further increase cybersecurity risk and stress-levels.

Continually Evolving Threats

The cybersecurity threat landscape evolves daily, with new vulnerabilities and attack methods constantly emerging. Sifting through numerous alerts to identify true threats can be overwhelming – leading to alert fatigue, a condition where critical warnings may be overlooked. To help address this, NRECA's Threat Analysis Center (TAC) provides curated, co-op-specific alerts tailored to your preferences, helping reduce noise while staying informed.

Employee Burnout

Burnout is a prevalent issue in the cybersecurity field, and cooperatives are not immune. Burnout is often marked by emotional exhaustion and a sense of reduced personal accomplishment. This condition can significantly impact productivity, leading to higher error rates and increased employee turnover. As a result, the overall security posture of a company may see increased cyber risk, making it crucial to proactively address burnout by implementing supportive measures to maintain a resilient cybersecurity team.

Mental Health Challenges

Cybersecurity professionals often experience anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues due to the demanding nature of their work. The high-pressure environment and constant vigilance required can take a significant toll on their well-being. Unfortunately, the stigma surrounding mental health can prevent individuals from seeking the help they need, exacerbating the problem and potentially leading to more severe consequences. Efforts by company leadership to address this stigma and promote mental health awareness is critical to support the well-being of cybersecurity teams.

Importance of Support Systems

A strong support system – internally and across the co-op community – makes a meaningful difference. To help employees cope with the demands of their work, encouraging a culture of openness and support can significantly reduce the stigma associated with mental health issues, making it easier for individuals to seek help when needed. By prioritizing mental health, companies can foster a healthier, more resilient workforce.

At smaller organizations like cooperatives, there may be only a few staff responsible for cybersecurity, and in some cases, these individuals come to the subject relatively new or without extensive training. This is where our Co-op Network provides significant value. NRECA offers an array of cybersecurity resources and opportunities (visit cooperative.com/cybersecurity), and our cybersecurity team is available to discuss cybersecurity challenges and help you access needed support (contact: membersecurity@nreca.coop). Furthermore, co-op colleagues often benefit from peer-to-peer learning at our annual events, such as [Co-op Cyber Tech Conference](#). It is important co-op staff know that you are not alone in this challenge of cybersecurity.

Benefits of Addressing Mental Health

By proactively addressing mental health challenges, companies can achieve many benefits. Improved mental health leads to better decision-making, enhanced problem-solving abilities, and increased creativity and innovation. A mentally healthy workforce is more resilient, adaptable, and capable of handling the complexities of the cybersecurity field. All of this leads to strengthening an organization's overall security posture.

In a field where the stakes are high, caring for mental health isn't optional – it's a strategic imperative.

Recommendations

- **Highlight Mental Health Programs:** Offer regular mental health check-ins, workshops, and access to professional counseling such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs).
- **Promote Work-Life Balance:** Encourage employees to take breaks, use their vacation time, and maintain a healthy work-life balance.
- **Foster a Supportive Culture:** We all know the importance of a healthy cybersecurity culture, but a culture that also supports an environment where employees feel comfortable discussing mental health issues without fear of judgment is just as important.

- **Increase Awareness and Training:** Educate all levels of staff with the skills to recognize signs of burnout and mental health issues. Ensure all team members are familiar with the resources provided by the cooperative to provide additional support.
- **Make Use of NRECA’s Cybersecurity Resources and Engagement Opportunities, and Contact NRECA’s Cybersecurity Team if You have Questions about Our Offerings:**
 - Visit our website at: cooperative.com/cybersecurity
 - Review our [cybersecurity resources brochure](#)
 - Read our [Cybersecurity Resources Summary advisory](#)
 - Sign-up for NRECA’s monthly [Business and Technology Strategies newsletter](#) to learn about the latest resources and opportunities.
 - Contact our team at: membersecurity@nreca.coop

Additional Resources

- NRECA On-Demand Webinar: [Mental Health In Cybersecurity: Balancing the Scales](#)
- [NRECA Cybersecurity Brochure](#)
- [NRECA Cybersecurity Website](#)
- #EndTheStigma
- #MentalHealthAwareness

Contact for Questions

NRECA Cybersecurity Team: membersecurity@nreca.coop