Business & Technology Advisory

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NRECA
America's Electric Cooperatives

Co-op Cyber Goals Program:
Second Year In Review

In January 2023, NRECA launched the Co-op Cyber Goals Program to help co-ops improve cybersecurity. This first phase of the voluntary program included 10 fundamental, actionable goals – called Level One – for NRECA members to complete individually, at their own pace, and in any order. In June 2024, NRECA debuted 10 new goals, known as Level Two to the program, providing additional ways for co-ops to advance their cybersecurity posture. Those who are enrolled in the Level One goals have automatic access to the Level Two goals to continue their cybersecurity preparedness.

To date, over 425 co-ops are participating in the Co-op Cyber Goals program. This strong NRECA member participation underscores to both industry and government that cooperatives of all sizes nationwide are taking proactive steps in cybersecurity. CEO of Summerdale, Alabama-based Baldwin County EMC, Hunter Robinson, emphasized "This program helps ready the co-op to meet the needs of today and prepare for the future."

> **Over 425 co-ops are participating in NRECA Co-op Cyber Goals Program to date.**

The Goals

NRECA's Co-op Cyber Goals are high-priority, fundamental cybersecurity measures intended to help co-ops establish solid foundations that future cybersecurity efforts can build upon. The program team selected goals from industry-standard cybersecurity performance goals.

Level One Goals:

Goal 1: Cybersecurity Point of Contact
Goal 2: Self-Assessment
Goal 3: Contract Review
Goal 4: Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA)
Goal 5: Default Password Policy

Goal 6: Leadership Training
Goal 7: Employee Training
Goal 8: IT/OT Segmentation
Goal 9: Cyber Incident Response Plan
Goal 10: Data Backups

Level Two Goals:

Goal 11: Separate User Accounts & Permissions
Goal 12: Asset Inventory
Goal 13: Logging
Goal 14: Internet Facing Systems
Goal 15: Business Continuity Plan

Goal 16: Information Sharing
Goal 17: Endpoint Security
Goal 18: Unique Passwords
Goal 19: Network Topology
Goal 20: Unauthorized Devices

Program participants access descriptions and resources for each goal, and track their progress through a secure, private online system. The goals can be completed in any order, and co-ops do not need to complete Level One before advancing to Level Two. While some goals relate to one another, any of the 20 goals can

be achieved in any order that participating co-ops choose. The self-paced nature of the program is intentional to recognize that all co-ops are unique with their own circumstances, including cybersecurity staff and cyber maturity.

Example of Level One Goal Reference Sheet

Example of Level Two Goal Reference Sheet

Evolution of the Goals Program

While the Level Two goals are very similar in structure to the Level One goals, in that they provide an explanation of the specific cybersecurity challenge and the purpose and benefits of the goal, NRECA added some additional features. The Level Two resource lists have been expanded to include:

- **Alignment with Industry Frameworks**

   NRECA recognizes that co-ops may be using other industry recommendations for advancing their cybersecurity preparedness and wonder how NRECA Co-op Cyber Goals relate to these other resources. By including information on the alignment of the Goals to these other resources, such as NIST and CISA, co-ops can better plan a comprehensive cybersecurity approach.

   Even if a co-op is participating in another industry organization's performance goals program, we highly encourage participation in NRECA's Co-op Cyber Goals. There may be some goals that complement other industry programs. For goals that are the same and achieved through another resource, co-ops can indicate in the NRECA Co-op Cyber Goals Program that those goals are achieved. We are less concerned with *how* co-ops are achieving these fundamental cybersecurity measures and more focused on assisting our members in advancing their cybersecurity posture. Also, NRECA's insight to **aggregate** cybersecurity status of our members through the Program helps us advocate for federal and other funding and resources for co-ops and to develop future resources that align to co-op needs.

- **Indication of Where Level One and Level Two Co-op Cyber Goals Relate**

   Cybersecurity topics may overlap, and to help indicate where Level Two goals extend the application of Level One goals' scope, NRECA has added reference between the two groups.

- **Information on Additional Resources from NRECA and Other Industry Stakeholders**

  Co-op Cyber Goals is just one of a variety of resources available to members to advance their cybersecurity posture. NRECA notes in the Goals descriptions where other complementary guidance can be found.

Co-ops Helping Co-ops

Upon completion of each Goal in the program, participants are asked to complete a few survey questions to provide feedback on completing the goals, the tools and resources used, any struggles encountered, and recommendations for other co-ops. This builds a strong co-op community of information sharing and allows NRECA to gain valuable insights regarding co-op cybersecurity needs and where to focus future offerings to support co-ops' continued progress.

In addition, new in 2024, the survey asks if the participating co-op is willing to mentor other co-ops in completing the goal. This presents a volunteer opportunity to help fellow co-ops and exemplify the Co-op Principle of Cooperation Among Cooperatives. It also recognizes that 'we are all in this together' and the advancement of each individual co-op's cybersecurity is advancement of the security of our national electrical grid.

Recognizing Co-ops Completing Goals

When a participating co-op finishes a Level, they receive a digital badge to use at their discretion to announce their accomplishment on their website and social media, and a commemorative coin to display.

Digital Badge
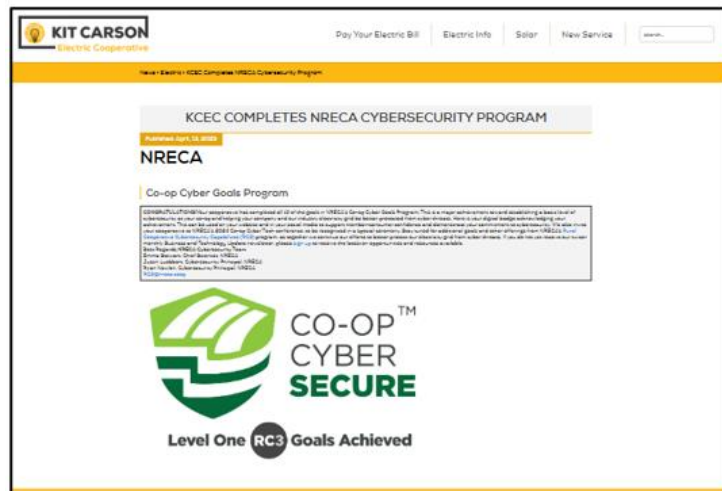

Commemorative Coin

Great River Energy Proudly Displays Their Co-op Cyber Goals Coin and Congratulatory Card (article)

Justin Davidson, IT manager at Markle, Indiana-based Heartland REMC, reflected on the program's value in saying: "We have focused on the NRECA Cyber Goals since they were launched, and we are very proud to have accomplished these goals in the time we have."

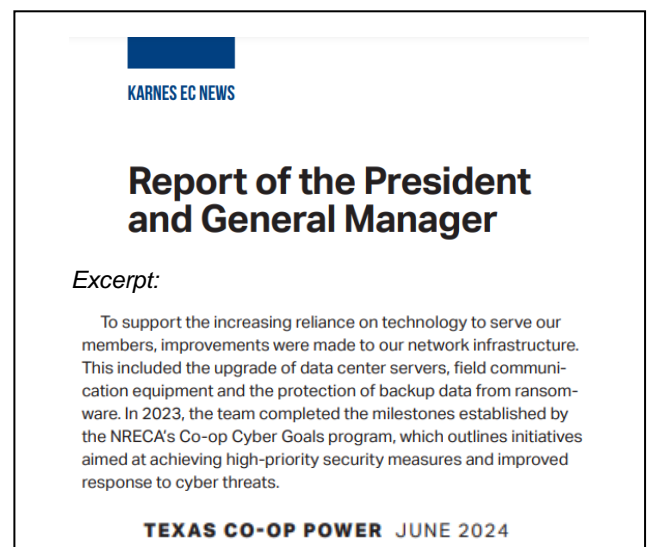Examples of co-ops announcing their accomplishments in NRECA Co-op Cyber Goals program on their websites:

https://kitcarson.com/kcec-completes-nreca-cybersecurity-program/

https://cepc.net/central-electric-power-cooperative-achieves-co-op-cyber-secure-recognition

FKEC Cybersecurity Program

Florida Keys Electric Cooperative is committed to protecting our member data and digital assets. To ensure security we implement a comprehensive cybersecurity program involving many tools and levels of monitoring protection that aims to surpass national standards that energy and defense companies are required to follow. This inlcudes completing all 10 of the goals in *NRECA's Co-op Cyber Goals program.*

https://fkec.com/about-us/cybersecurity/

Coles-Moultrie Facebook Announcement

Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative
May 1 ·

Way to go CMEC! Thank you to our IT folks for helping us complete all 10 goals of NRECA's Co-op Cyber Goals Program. (292 NRECA members registered with 58 completing all 10 goals)

KARNES EC NEWS

Report of the President and General Manager

Excerpt:

To support the increasing reliance on technology to serve our members, improvements were made to our network infrastructure. This included the upgrade of data center servers, field communication equipment and the protection of backup data from ransomware. In 2023, the team completed the milestones established by the NRECA's Co-op Cyber Goals program, which outlines initiatives aimed at achieving high-priority security measures and improved response to cyber threats.

TEXAS CO-OP POWER JUNE 2024

NRECA recognized co-ops who completed the Level One goals in time for our annual Co-op Cyber Tech conference. In May 2023, 58 co-ops were recognized, and in June 2024, 81 additional co-ops were

recognized. Read more in this related article, "NRECA Unveils Next Set of Co-op Cyber Goals; 81 More Co-ops Achieve Level One".

Cyber Tech Conference, May 2023

Cyber Tech Conference, June 2024

In Bandera Electric Cooperative's news article about the program, they highlighted the recognition ceremony and their IT Manager, Dylan Sauce, shared their dedication to the program in saying, "Completing level one of the Co-op Cyber Goals Program is a significant milestone for BEC. We are now focused on advancing to level two and beyond."

Chief Security and Compliance Officer of Basin Electric Power Cooperative, Daniel Graham, emphasized the importance of the program in facing today's challenges, "Programs like NRECA's Co-op Cyber Goals Program help co-ops build fundamental cybersecurity measures, such as employee training, developing cyber incident response plans, and regular self-assessment. These strategies help co-ops reduce the risk of a successful cyberattack in the ongoing battle against cybercrime." (Featured in Reville-Sibley "Cooperative Connections," and West Central Electric "Cooperative Connections," May 2024.)

Looking Ahead: Integrating Cyber Goals into Other NRECA Cybersecurity Efforts

As we proceed into the third year of the Program, NRECA is focused on integrating the Cyber Goals into the other NRECA Cybersecurity offerings to provide a comprehensive approach to co-op cybersecurity advancement. The following are some examples:

- **Project Guardian 61-7A**

  A key focus for Project Guardian is to create resources that help co-ops easily self-identify their own categorization based on cybersecurity maturity and then select tailored resources appropriate to their specific needs. This approach includes refining the Cyber Goals resources, so they align with these defined categories. For example, templates to develop Incident Response Plans (Goal #9) will be designed to suit the needs of different co-op maturity levels.

  All 20 of the Cyber Goals will be mapped to five categories, giving co-ops clearer guidance on where to start – beyond simply choosing Level One or Level Two of the Co-op Cyber Goals. Project Guardian is multi-faceted, with an emphasis on establishing frameworks that support the continued growth of cybersecurity capabilities.

  One of the framework concepts is that of "Cyber Champions," or designated co-ops that will help other co-ops strengthen their cybersecurity preparedness. These Cyber Champions will assist with tasks such as conducting Self Assessments (Goal #2), Leadership Training (Goal #6), Employee Training (Goal #7), and Information Sharing (Goal #16).

- **NRECA Threat Analysis Center (TAC)**

  Participation in TAC supports co-op awareness, discussion, and threat reporting. This information sharing can help meet Goal #9 – Incident Response Plan; and Goal #16 – Information Sharing.

- **Industrial Control Systems for Rural Electric Cooperatives (ICS-REC) Program**

  This project supports deployment of technologies and systems for cyber visibility, detection, and response capabilities for industrial control systems (ICS) of electric utilities. This can support Cyber Goals such as Asset Inventory (Goal #12), Information Sharing via TAC (Goal #16), IT and OT Segmentation (Goal #8), End Point Security (Goal #17), and Network Topology (Goal #19).

We encourage all co-ops to participate in the Co-op Cyber Goals Program, and those currently enrolled to continue progressing to completion of all the Goals. Co-ops with questions or any difficulty completing a Goal are welcomed to contact our Cybersecurity Team at: membersecurity@nreca.coop.

Contact: NRECA Cybersecurity Team membersecurity@nreca.coop

Program Website: www.cooperative.com/cybergoalsprogram

Additional Resources

- Article: NRECA Unveils Next Set of Co-op Cyber Goals; 81 More Co-ops Achieve Level One
- Article: Co-ops Begin Meeting NRECA's Level Two Cyber Goals
- Report: RE Magazine Special Report: Co-op Cybersecurity
- Advisory: Cybersecurity Resources Summary
- Article: New DOE Award of $5 Million to NRECA to Expand Cybersecurity Programs for Co-ops