

Staying Ahead of Cyber Threats

People are spending more of their lives online – whether for work, school, or recreation – as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and experts say it is important for everyone to be aware of possible cybersecurity threats.

According to the faculty at University of Hawai'i–West O'ahu Information Security and Assurance (ISA) program, defending against existing threats is complicated by the introduction of new threats specifically designed to target remote users who are operating from home-based computer and network environments – as many users are doing now – which are generally at greater risk to compromise.

Examples of such threats include malware (software specifically designed to interfere with normal computer functions), business email compromise, and social engineering campaigns that involve phishing (scam where an Internet user is tricked into revealing personal or confidential information), data theft, and account and device compromise.

UH West O'ahu's ISA program, a recognized National Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense Education and a leader in the state for cybersecurity education, offers advice on how home-based users can protect themselves and defend against cybersecurity threats, which involves a combination of technology, processes, and user behavior. Among its recommendations:

- Update operating system and applications to current versions
- Configure operating system security and firewall options
- Install and update anti-virus/anti-malware protection
- Utilize complex passwords to access devices and online services
- Enable multi-factor authentication security options
- Enable wireless network router and firewall security settings
- Encrypt sensitive data stored on storage devices or cloud services
- Enable security features and validate participants on virtual meeting and conference services, such as Zoom

In addition to technical considerations, users must maintain an increased level of cybersecurity awareness to include potential social engineering attempts using voice calls, text messages, email, and social media sites.



Preparing for Hurricane Season

Central Pacific hurricane season is here – running from June 1 to Nov. 30 – and Hawai'i's hurricane response strategy has evolved in light of COVID-19. For example, Jason Levy, professor of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (DPEM) at University of Hawai'i–West O'ahu, notes that face-covering masks will be required in evacuation shelters where social distancing will be enforced and health screenings will become standard; if a fever is detected, the evacuee will receive medical attention in an isolation room.

Dr. Levy and colleagues have been working across the Indo-Pacific region to help vulnerable communities prepare for COVID-19 and tropical storms. For example, they have developed partnerships with NGOs in India to support authentic and accurate public messaging to counter COVID-19 misinformation and social media manipulation. They are also leveraging the expertise of mentors and institutions from across the U.S. to lead COVID-19 capacity-building exercises and build public-private partnerships (PPP) for disaster risk reduction in India.

DPEM faculty offer valuable tips to help families protect and empower themselves during this hurricane season and the current pandemic, including:

- Plan ahead to prepare a 14-day emergency kit of food, water, and other supplies
- Add new items in the emergency kit to address COVID-19, including a 14-day supply of face masks and hand sanitizer
- Make a hurricane preparedness action plan
- Pay attention to local emergency information and alerts
- Avoid walking, swimming, or driving through flood waters

