Announcement
GridEx Helps Identify Lessons Learned, Recommendations for Enhancing Grid Security

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Assuring the reliability and security of the bulk power system continue to be focal points for NERC and industry. Focused on that mission, NERC hosted its fourth grid security exercise – GridEx IV – in November. In its report on the exercise, NERC identified recommendations and lessons learned to enhance grid security and information sharing based on feedback from the more than 450 participating organizations and 6,500 individuals.

Facilitated by NERC’s Electricity Information Sharing and Analysis Center, GridEx IV was the largest exercise to date with participants from industry, government law enforcement and the private sector. The two-day event consisted of an exercise scenario with an executive tabletop for senior industry executives and government officials and provided an opportunity for stakeholders to respond to simulated cyber and physical attacks that affect the reliable operation of the grid.

“The level of participation in GridEx IV shows the commitment that NERC and industry have toward improving security and information sharing,” said Bill Lawrence, director of the E-ISAC. “GridEx continues to be a vital part of our cyber and physical security training and education efforts.”

The report’s recommendations cover GridEx topics including enhancements in planning the exercise, engaging law enforcement and other critical infrastructures, the functionality of the E-ISAC portal and communications. Recommendation highlights from the executive tabletop portion focused on the following, among others:

- **Increase Utility Coordination with State and Local Governments:** Utilities should continue to build their relationships and communications capabilities with law enforcement and state and local governments to ensure information is shared early and often.
- **Enhance ESCC and EGCC communications:** The Electricity Subsector Coordinating Council and Energy Government Coordinating Council play an important coordinative role and should continue to enhance their ability to share information at the national level.
- **Increase Coordination with Federal Government**: The Department of Defense and many other federal agencies will place their highest priority on stopping the attacks at their source, preventing future attacks, and identifying the adversaries.

- **Strengthen Coordination with Other Critical Infrastructures**: Utilities and the E-ISAC should strengthen their relationships with other critical infrastructures to consider the challenges of a severe event.

- **Develop ESCC Process for Emergency Orders**: The Department of Energy, the EGCC and the ESCC should develop consultation processes to help ensure any emergency orders are appropriate.

- **Ensure Utilities have Access to Sensitive Information**: Government should work to quickly declassify information that utilities need to prevent or respond to attacks.

- **Ensure Financial Needs are met during Recovery**: Under this severe attack scenario, utilities would need extraordinary levels of government financing to maintain recovery operations.

- **Continue to Promote the Cyber Mutual Assistance Program**: The CMA program should continue to enhance its capability by engaging more members and other stakeholders such as the E-ISAC, critical supply chains, and National Guard.

Recommendations from the distributed-play portion of the exercise included increasing participation from law enforcement and other critical infrastructures; enhancing Reliability Coordinator communication; and increasing communications resilience, among others.

“This exercise provides a meaningful snapshot of how industry and government are focused on continually improving and working together to coordinate an effective response to any real threat to the operations of the bulk power system,” Lawrence said.

NERC and the E-ISAC will continue to work closely with industry and government stakeholders to enhance industry’s readiness and further evolve the GridEx program based on the recommendations and lessons learned gathered during the exercise. The security landscape in North America is dynamic and requires constant vigilance and agility. Events and coordination like GridEx ensure that industry is as prepared as possible. NERC remains focused on our mission to assure the reliability and resilience of the grid, which is inextricably tied to grid security.

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The vision for the Electric Reliability Organization (ERO) Enterprise, which is comprised of the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) and the eight Regional Entities (REs), is a highly reliable and secure North American bulk power system (BPS). Our mission is to assure the effective and efficient reduction of risks to the reliability and security of the grid.