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# San Diego Regional Cyber Lab Launches to Bolster Cybersecurity Defenses Locally

**NEW REGIONAL RESOURCE TO HELP PREVENT AND PROTECT AGAINST CYBERATTACKS; LAB OFFERS FREE CYBER SIMULATION TOOLS FOR TRAINING**

SAN DIEGO – With cybersecurity concerns on the rise following several major ransomware attacks nationwide, the City of San Diego has launched the San Diego Regional Cyber Lab to help local agencies prevent and protect against cyberattacks.

The Cyber Lab serves as a regional resource for small businesses, public agencies and educational institutions to utilize for specialized training with safe environments to simulate and defend against cyberattacks. The lab’s mission is to provide coordinated cybersecurity awareness for the greater San Diego region through collaborative access to the latest technology, intelligence and training tools.

**“We’ve all heard the horror stories of high-profile attacks that have held companies and public agencies hostage, costing them millions in lost productivity or ransoms,” said Darren Bennett, the City’s Chief Information Security Officer (CISO). “We must remain vigilant in defending against these ever-evolving threats and, with this new San Diego Regional Cyber Lab, we’ll be stronger as a region by working together against a common enemy.”**

The San Diego Regional Cyber Lab’s physical lab space is a no-risk sandbox environment where information technology professionals can further develop their cybersecurity skills in real-time scenarios. The lab has both PC and Mac environments connected to multiple servers running various virtual machines that can be manipulated, modified and attacked in different ways.

The Cyber Lab offers free cyber simulation tools, including:

- The Free Range – Provides a collaborative, cloud-based platform for training, development and testing of cybersecurity tools in a safe and controlled environment.
- The Haiku Range – The cybersecurity equivalent of a flight simulator that allows users of all levels develop real-world skills in a game-like virtual environment.
- Cyber Catch – A cloud-based cyber incident simulator specifically designed for small and medium-sized organizations.

**“Cybersecurity is now everyone’s business! The FBI reports a 300% increase in cybercrimes across all industries since the pandemic began with more than half of these costly attacks aimed at small and medium-sized businesses – our region’s economic engine,”** said Lisa Easterly, President and CEO of Cyber Center of Excellence, a San Diego-based nonprofit dedicated to growing the regional cyber economy and creating a more secure digital community for all. **“The Cyber Lab will now provide these organizations with collaborative resources to gauge and harden their cyber readiness and train staff in risk-free scenarios, ultimately strengthening the region’s cyber resiliency.”**

Cybercrime has soared in recent years with an estimated \$7 trillion in damages in 2022, according to industry expert Cybersecurity Ventures. There have also been several recent attacks on San Diego’s local agencies and institutions, including Scripps Health, the Port of San Diego, the City of San Marcos and UC San Diego Health.

The City received two grants from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security totaling about \$928,000 to create the San Diego Regional Cyber Lab. The City formed a working group of cybersecurity experts, academics, local CEOs and public officials from across the San Diego region to help design and develop the lab.

As part of the development process, the City surveyed about 200 agencies in the San Diego region about cybersecurity preparedness. Most had zero cybersecurity professionals on staff or assigned cybersecurity responsibilities to a single IT staff member with little to no experience or training in cybersecurity.

**“Cyberattacks are occurring with greater frequency and growing complexity, so it’s incredibly important that we have a united front as a region working collaboratively between commercial, critical infrastructure and government to defend ourselves against cybercrime,”** said Macy Dennis, Founder of the [San Diego CISO Round Table](#) and partner at [Ember River](#). **“This new Cyber Lab will be an invaluable resource for small business owners, students and public-sector IT professionals who want to get hands-on experience with the latest technology and learn how to prevent and defend against attacks.”**

The San Diego Regional Cyber Lab also launched a new website – [sandiego.gov/cyber-lab](https://sandiego.gov/cyber-lab) – where organizations can schedule appointments to use the lab for training or educational purposes. The website serves as an information hub with training materials, threat intelligence feeds, and a collection of the most popular newsletters, podcasts and other resources to keep up with the ever-changing cybersecurity industry.

According to a report by RiskBased Security, there were over 4,100 publicly disclosed cybersecurity breaches in 2021 with over 22 billion records exposed – the second-highest amount of confidential data compromised since 2005. A 2022 report by IBM Security found the average global cost of a data breach is about \$4.4 million – the highest ever recorded in its annual report.

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