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INFORMATION BULLETIN 21-01 – Regulated Entities and Cybersecurity

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In recent months, utilities and energy sectors have experienced increased activity and risk related to cybersecurity.

In late 2020, critical infrastructure providers, including utilities, became aware of a cyberattack that planted malicious code in certain SolarWinds software to create a backdoor entrance to its customers. Further, in February 2021, Powertech Labs, a research-based entity and wholly owned subsidiary of British Columbia Hydro and Power Authority (BC Hydro), experienced a cyber-attack targeting data held by the company. In addition, various utility operators have seen ongoing attempts to gain direct access to their cyber systems. If successful, these cyber-attacks grant system access to hackers who can then extract data and install malware or ransomware.

The British Columbia Utilities Commission (BCUC) considers cyber risk a significant threat to all regulated entities in British Columbia. The likelihood of experiencing a successful cyberattack is increasing. As such, the BCUC expects all regulated entities to mitigate cyber exposure and establish a plan to respond effectively in the event of a cyber-attack.

All entities should be vigilant in protecting customer information, operating data and system controls from any threat, including a potential cyber-attack. Regulated entities should perform a thorough and appropriate cybersecurity vulnerability assessment on their operations, have a detailed and tested disaster recovery plan and ensure adequately skilled resources are available to execute the recovery plan in the event of an attack. Regular monitoring of systems should be conducted to detect any cyberbreaches that may have occurred.

Various resources are available to support regulated utilities in assessing and addressing cyber risk and cyberattack. The leading organizations in cybersecurity for the utility and energy industries in Canada and North America are listed below. The BCUC reminds regulated entities of their obligations to provide safe and reliably services to customers and as such, strongly encourages all regulated entities to review these links and implement appropriate recommendations:

- **The Canadian Center for Cybersecurity** offers various services related to cybersecurity. Its website provides updates on current threats, tools for cybersecurity vulnerability self-assessment, best practices for cyber-protections and disaster recovery planning. Canadian entities can register for additional services including planning & monitoring support, tailored risk notifications, and access to other industry support to address cyber risk and recovery.

  A link to learn more is found here: https://cyber.gc.ca/en/

- In the United States, **the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)** has created a framework that is recognized as a leading tool in cybersecurity. It is scalable, is supported by various educational tools and provides hands on tools & examples.

  A link to learn more is found here: https://www.nist.gov/cyberframework

- **The Electricity Information Sharing and Analysis Center (E-ISAC)** strives to provide rapid sharing of information for the electricity industry. E-ISAC offers a portal to register and receive timely information on emerging cyberthreats and mitigation recommendations. Industry participants share information, analyze readiness, and collaborate on matters of cybersecurity. The BCUC strongly encourages all BC Mandatory Reliability Standards registrants to participate in E-ISAC.

  A link to learn more is found here: https://www.eisac.com/

- **The Oil and Natural Gas Information Sharing and Analysis Center (ONG-ISAC)** is a cybersecurity hub that strives to communicate and coordinate against cyberattacks. It facilitates analysis and trusted & timely information sharing. Entities can gain membership on the ONG-ISAC.

  A link to learn more is found here: https://ongisac.org/

- The **CSA Group** (formerly the **Canadian Standards Association**) is a global organization dedicated to safety, social good and sustainability. They develop various standards as well as providing education and certification opportunities. The CSA group offers cybersecurity certification and has developed several standards related to cybersecurity relevant to the utility and energy industry.

  A link to learn more is found here:
  https://www.csagroup.org/testing-certification/testing/cybersecurity/

  [Note: Details on applicability of CSA standards in BC can be found at:
  BC Oil and Gas Commission https://www.bcogc.ca/
  Technical Safety BC at: https://www.technicalsafetybc.ca/]

Managing Cybersecurity is important to ensure customer privacy, safety and sustainability of operations for all regulated entities. The BCUC expects all regulated entities to adequately address cyber risk within their operations to protect customers, stakeholders, shareholders, and the critical infrastructure of British Columbia. Please contact the BCUC with any questions or to receive additional information.

About the BCUC

The BCUC is an independent regulatory body, responsible for regulating British Columbia's energy utilities, as well as its compulsory automobile insurance rates, and intra-provincial pipelines rates. The BCUC is also responsible for administering BC's Fuel Price Transparency Act. It is the BCUC's role to balance the interests of customers with the interests of the businesses it regulates. The BCUC carries out fair and transparent reviews of matters within its jurisdiction and considers public input where public interest is impacted.

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