

DOE says supercomputers handling COVID-19 data are hacker targets

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Energy Department officials said they have noticed a spike in cyberattacks on national laboratories and that foreign nations are interested in U.S. coronavirus research.

"We are seeing some increased activities around our national laboratories in particular, with regard to cyber activity. Slight increases in the number of hits that we see to our computing facilities there," Energy Secretary Dan Brouillette said Thursday at a meeting with an advisory board.

"We have not had any problems" with cyberattacks, said Paul Dabbar, the DOE's undersecretary for science who oversees the network of 17 national labs. "But, as the secretary pointed out, we've had some increase."

Government agencies and private experts say cyberattacks have increased during the pandemic as the number of people working remotely—a larger pool of targets for hackers—has surged worldwide during stay-at-home restrictions.

Brouillette said foreign powers want to crack open American research on the virus. "We know that there are [nation-states](#) around the world who are interested in some of the research that's being done in the laboratories, some of the data sets that exist within the laboratories," he said.

Brouillette added: "They're very interested in some of our specific research around COVID-19." The Energy Department's supercomputers are being used to sift through the disease research.

The FBI and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, a unit of the Homeland Security Department, issued a warning of attacks from China last week.

"The FBI is investigating the targeting and compromise of U.S. organizations conducting COVID-19-related research by PRC-affiliated cyber actors and nontraditional collectors," the agencies said in a May 13

news release, using the shorthand for the People's Republic of China.

The World Health Organization said in April it has experienced a "fivefold" increase in cyberattacks, including through the leaking of hundreds of emails and passwords.

Mark Menezes, the No. 3 official at DOE and President Donald Trump's nominee to become deputy secretary, said cyberattacks against electric utilities have also increased in recent months.

"We have seen heightened cyber threats on our [energy](#) system," he said.

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