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Southampton reacts to breach of employee files

By CATHERINE BAUM
Staff Writer

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SOUTHAMPTON - A security audit of the Southampton Town Hall computer network was performed Wednesday following an incident last month in which an unauthorized town employee was able to access town employee personnel information, including Social Security numbers and payroll information.

Selectmen signed a letter Tuesday informing employees about the matter. Town Administrator Diana Schindler slid the letters underneath Town Hall office doors following the meeting, Selectmen Chairman Jess Dods said, stating that the issue was already fixed and a security audit of all computers connected to the Town Hall network was set for Wednesday. Jason Turcotte, of Turcotte Data and Designs in Easthampton, had blocked unauthorized town employees from getting into payroll records, Dods said.

The Department of Revenue was notified and provided Southampton officials with advice about how security could be enhanced for the new Town Hall server, according to DOR spokesman Robert Bliss.

Turcotte, who was at Town Hall Wednesday, declined to say how the information was accessed, when it happened or what was breached.

Turcotte, who revamped the Town Hall computer network this fall, said the problem of unauthorized access was not related to his company's work.

"Nothing was exposed to the world outside Town Hall," said Turcotte, whose clients include public safety units for 10 municipalities including Southampton. Southampton is the only Town Hall he serves.

The new server was installed in Town Hall to reduce data redundancy, centralize data storage and backup and increase security with a new firewall. Twelve computers in Town Hall are connected to the server.

Dods confirmed that the reported unauthorized access to employee personnel information is not a result of the new server, but of the former network.

"There are obvious security holes from the previous network setup that need to be rectified," said Dods, who noted holes were uncovered in the network switch. "This is simply a bug in the system."

The town employee "accidentally" accessed the payroll records, according to Dods, who heard about the issue from Schindler and Turcotte. Dods said he does not know who the employee is.

"I don't think people were snooping around - nobody was trying to hack in the system," Dods said. "There was no abuse of the system. It's not very dramatic."

Payroll records for about 115 town employees, including William E. Norris Elementary School employees, is stored on the Town Hall network, according to the treasurer's office. Information can



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include Social Security numbers, addresses and direct deposits.

Dods noted that payroll information is available at the library and in the town's annual report.

"If I wanted to find out how much somebody made, I'd go down to the library," Dods said.

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