

STAKEHOLDER ANNOUNCEMENT

USDA Partners With White House, National Rural Water Association to Strengthen Cybersecurity for Rural Water Systems

WASHINGTON, Oct. 31, 2024 – U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development Under Secretary Dr. Basil Gooden today announced that USDA is partnering with the White House Office of the National Cyber Director (ONCD) and the National Rural Water Association (NRWA) to launch a one-year program study to enhance cybersecurity for rural water systems.

USDA is expanding its [Circuit Rider Program](#) to include more resources and personnel who are specifically trained to assess and improve cybersecurity capabilities at water systems in rural areas.

Through the Circuit Rider Program, USDA partners with NRWA to provide personnel in each U.S. state and territory known as “circuit riders” to help rural water systems navigate day-to-day operational, financial and managerial issues.

The additional circuit riders will lead a variety of cybersecurity-focused activities for a year starting Nov. 1, 2024. These activities include:

- assessing the cybersecurity capacity of rural water systems to determine where support, training and improvements are needed.
- providing a blueprint for how to implement a permanent cyber-support program after the year ends.
- training all 132 existing circuit riders in 50 states and Puerto Rico on cybersecurity issues in water utilities.

The Oregon Association of Water Utilities and Vermont Rural Water Association will help NRWA administer the one-year study.

Earlier this year, the White House National Security Advisor sent [a letter](#) to all state governors about the importance of strengthening water and wastewater systems’ capabilities to deal with increasing cyberattacks.

These attacks can threaten clean and safe drinking water, as well as burden communities with significant costs. Drinking water and wastewater systems, especially those in rural areas, are an attractive target for cyberattacks because they often lack the resources and technical capacity to identify, respond to and recover from incidents.

Today’s announcement comes during [Cybersecurity Awareness Month](#), a collaborative effort between government and industry to enhance cybersecurity awareness, encourage actions by the public to reduce online risk, and generate discussion on cyber threats on a national and global scale.

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