ANNUAL REPORT
2024

GovCERT.HK

www.govcert.gov.hk

HIGHLIGHTS OF 2024

1.1 Summary of Major Activities

The Government Computer Emergency Response Team Hong Kong (GovCERT.HK) persistently collaborated with different stakeholders to implement a wide range of activities and initiatives for strengthening cybersecurity resilience, promoting cybersecurity awareness, and enhancing defensive capabilities within the community, aiming at fortifying our defences and security posture as a whole.

1.2 Achievements and Milestones

Fortifying Cyber Security Resilience

To enhance the professional skills and incident response capabilities of cybersecurity personnel, we organised a series of attack and defence training and tournament with the Cyber Security and Technology Crime Bureau (CSTCB) of the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF) and the Hong Kong Internet Registration Corporation Limited (HKIRC). We also launched Hong Kong's first Cybersecurity Attack and Defence Drill in collaboration with CSTCB, HKIRC and the Hong Kong Institute of Information Technology (HKIIT) with a view to strengthening the overall defensive capabilities of government departments and public organisations against cyberattacks. Furthermore, we conducted a comprehensive review of government information security regulations, policies, and guidelines to ensure their effectiveness and robustness and enhanced the monitoring systems and mechanisms for intelligence gathering, striving to strengthen our resilience for the evolving threats and challenges.

HIGHLIGHTS OF 2024

Awareness and Capability Building

To foster a comprehensive understanding of cybersecurity within the community, we collaborated with industry stakeholders to organise the Cybersecurity Awareness Campaign 2024, under the theme "Together, We Create a Safe Cyberworld". We launched a series of activities including contests, game booths, seminars and forums. The Cybersecurity Symposium 2024 was one of the major highlights, bringing together industry leaders to collectively share and address cybersecurity challenges. To show our commitment and determination in strengthening the cybersecurity knowledge of IT practitioners, a wide spectrum of thematic seminars, technical workshops, certificate courses on information security and cyber security incident response were introduced and newly launched in 2024.

Liaison and Collaboration

We actively participated in Asia Pacific Computer Emergency Response Team (APCERT) training and drill exercises, collaborating closely with local organisations and global partners to exchange technical insights and enhance incident response and coordination. We signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Cyberspace Administration of Guangdong Province and the Comissão para a Cibersegurança of Macao SAR to facilitate cybersecurity exchange and collaboration in the Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA).

ABOUT GOVCERT.HK

2.1 Introduction

GovCERT.HK is a governmental CERT responsible for coordinating incident responses for over 80 departmental Information Security Incident Response Teams (ISIRTs) of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China ("the Government").

GovCERT.HK works closely with HKCERT, local industries and critical Internet infrastructure stakeholders on cyber threat intelligence sharing, capability development, public education and continuous promotion on cyber security. GovCERT.HK also actively collaborates with other governmental and regional CERTs, and international organisations in sharing cyber threat intelligence and incident information; participating in training events, workshops, forums and drills; and organising activities for public awareness promotion and capability development, with a view to enhancing information and cyber security in the region.

2.2 Establishment

GovCERT.HK was established on 1 April 2015 through the consolidation of internal IT security teams within the Digital Policy Office (DPO) (formerly Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO)) of the Government.

2.3 Resources

GovCERT.HK is an establishment under DPO (formerly OGCIO) and funded by the Government.

2.4 Mission and Constituency

Being the governmental CERT, GovCERT.HK centrally manages incident responses within the Government and develops CERT–related services to assist government departments in understanding the associated risks of information and cyber security, implementing appropriate security measures, monitoring potential threats and responding to security events with a view to ensuring robust protection of government's information infrastructure.
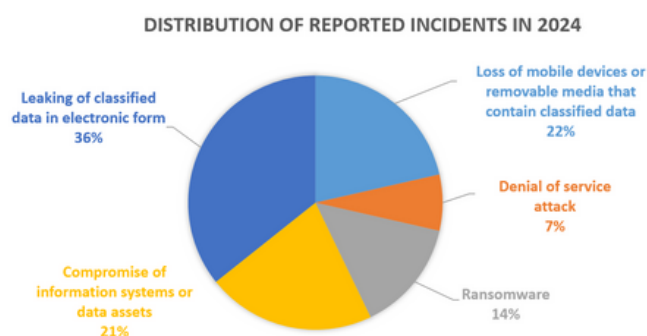
ACTIVITIES AND OPERATIONS

3.1 Alerts and Advisories

In 2024, GovCERT.HK issued 262 security alerts on known security vulnerabilities reported in common products. For those vulnerabilities with higher severity level, we proactively requested government departments to take prompt and appropriate preventive measures against potential information security risks.

3.2 Incident Handling Reports

GovCERT.HK handled 14 reported incidents related to government installations, with the incident types shown below:

DISTRIBUTION OF REPORTED INCIDENTS IN 2024

Leaking of classified data in electronic form 36%

Loss of mobile devices or removable media that contain classified data 22%

Denial of service attack 7%

Ransomware 14%

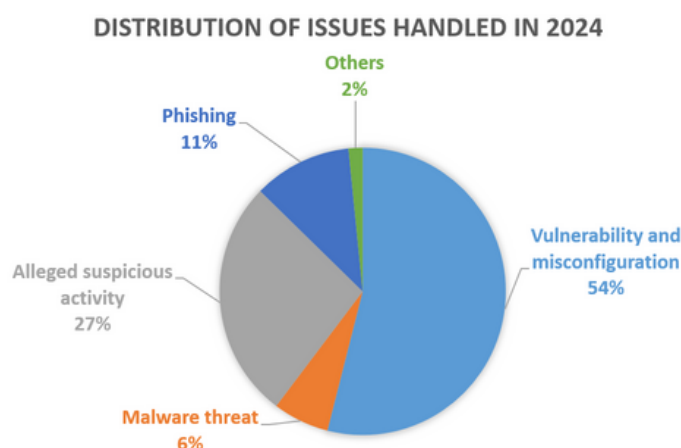Compromise of information systems or data assets 21%

Relevant statistics on information security incidents in the Government are available on the Government's Public Sector Information Portal for public access.
(http://www.data.gov.hk/en-data/dataset/hk-dpo-pgc_div_01-information-security-incident)

3.3 Abuse Statistics

GovCERT.HK assisted government departments to take effective and prompt measures to prevent and reduce the risks and impacts of cyberattacks on their information systems, with the types of security issues shown below:

DISTRIBUTION OF ISSUES HANDLED IN 2024

- Others 2%
- Phishing 11%
- Alleged suspicious activity 27%
- Malware threat 6%
- Vulnerability and misconfiguration 54%

3.4 Publications and Mass Media

To proactively reach out to the public, we continued to share tips and best practices against cyber threats through multiple channels.

- We partnered with Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) to broadcast radio episodes "e-World Smart Tips", covering a wide range of topics such as tips for sharenting tips, netiquette, Web 3.0, cloud services, smart travelling and safe use instant messaging and mobile devices, in a lively and interesting way.
  (www.cybersecurity.hk/en/media.php#Radio)

- We published practical leaflets and infographics with themes such as security tips for using QR codes and guide on using instant messaging to educate the public to protect themselves against cyberattacks. (www.cybersecurity.hk/en/resources.php)

- We organised "Together, We Create a Safe Cyberworld" Tram Body Design Contest. Many creative and impactful designs, interestingly raising public awareness of cybersecurity in an artistic way, were well-received, reminding the public from falling into online traps and strengthening the city-wide defence against cyberattacks.

Winning Entries

- We published a series of posts on the DPO Facebook page, with updates and tips on the latest cyber security news such as precautions for e-payment, privacy protection and data protection to enhance public awareness.
(http://www.facebook.com/digitalpolicyhk)

3.5 GovCERT.HK Technology Centre

We continued to operate the GovCERT.HK Technology Centre, which provided adequate facilities and equipment to develop the capability of government staff to tackle evolving cyber threats, identify and remediate from potential security weaknesses in a controlled environment.

EVENTS ORGANISED/HOSTED

4.1 Training

Seminars/Webinars

In 2024, we organised various seminars, webinars and training featuring the latest IT security technologies and solutions, the latest cyber security threats and handling strategies. Over 7 000 government staff participated in the events with topics on security risk management, multi-factor authentication, Endpoint detection and response (EDR), Network detection and response (NDR) and protection against malicious web content.

In collaboration with the Civil Service College, we organised an Innovation and Technology (I&T) leadership series of thematic seminars to enhance the understanding and capabilities of government senior management in information system management, cybersecurity and data security.

Certificate in Cybersecurity for the Public Sector

With the aim to enhancing the skills of the staff of government departments and public organisations in IT management and applications, we worked closely with the HKIIT in 2024 to develop a wide range of IT-related training courses including the Certificate in Cybersecurity for the Public Sector which were recognised under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF).

4.2 Drills and Exercises

Inter-departmental Cyber Security Drill

GovCERT.HK joined hands with the CSTCB of HKPF to organise the annual inter-departmental cyber security drill (the Drill) to strengthen the preparedness and the overall incident response capability of bureaux and departments (B/Ds) to cyberattacks. Iin 2024, over 250 government officers from 70 B/Ds joined the Drill and online training workshop for sharing latest strategies and techniques in handling cyberattacks.

Cyber Health Check Exercise

A series of technical assessments was carried out to evaluate the effectiveness of existing security controls and identify potential weaknesses in government Internet-facing systems, critical infrastructure and mobile applications, with a view to building a stronger defence.

Hong Kong Cybersecurity Attack and Defence Drill 2024

We spearheaded to launch the first Hong Kong Cybersecurity Attack and Defence Drill in collaboration with the CSTCB of HKPF, HKIRC, and HKIIT in 2024, to enhance the technical skills, strategy, experience, and overall defence capabilities of participants in identifying and responding to cyberattacks. Blue Teams from government departments and public organisations participated in the drill, utilising their skills and knowledge to defence their information systems. Moreover, representatives from more than 50 organisations were invited as observers to gain insights and experience from the drill .

4.3 Conferences and Seminars

Build a Secure Cyberspace Promotional Campaign

A series of promotional activities under the theme "Together, We Create a Safe Cyberworld" were organised for businesses, organisations, schools and the public to raise their cyber security awareness and strengthen their cyber security postures. A set of interactive game booths were showcased for nine days at a shopping mall for fostering interest of the community in a fun environment while learning cybersecurity protection skills. Webinars and seminars were also organised under the campaign to further deepen cybersecurity knowledge of the participants.
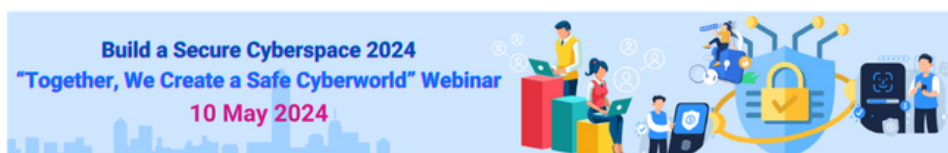
School visits and security talks for non–governmental organisations (NGOs)

To promote cyber security awareness and cyber etiquette, we organised a total of 53 visits to primary and secondary schools, tertiary institutions, and NGOs to deliver information security talks to students, teachers, parents, service recipients and staff of NGOs.

InfoSec Tours with RTHK Radio 2

We continued to partner with the RTHK to conduct three InfoSec Tours with topics of "Cybersecurity and Information Literacy", "Safety Rules for the Cyberworld" and "Proctect yourself in the Cyberworld", which delivered information security messages in a relaxing way while promoting the importance of online safety and security.

Cybersec Infohub engagement activities

To encourage the engagement and effective discussion among public and private organisations on cybersecurity, various activities such as sector-specific meeting and networking, technical professional workshops, webinars and seminars were arranged under the Cybersec Infohub partnership programme with affirmative feedback.

China Cybersecurity Week Hong Kong Sub-forum

We, along with the CSTCB of HKPF and the HKIRC, jointly organized the "China Cybersecurity Week Hong Kong Sub-forum 2024". A number of cybersecurity industry leaders and scholars from the Mainland and Hong Kong were invited as guest speakers to share and exchange views on the latest cybersecurity technologies and trends. The event attracted more than 200 public and private organisations with over 400 participants.

Cybersecurity Symposium 2024

We organised the Cybersecurity Symposium 2024 with the HKIRC and CSTCB of HKPF, aiming at fostering collaboration between public and private organisations and supporting Hong Kong's development as a leading digital economy, thereby strengthening Hong Kong's overall cybersecurity defence and resilience capabilities,. Several insightful keynote speeches and panel discussion sessions were held during the symposium. It brought together over 30 industry experts and business leaders from the Mainland and Hong Kong, as well as around 1 000 industry professionals from public and private organisations.

LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

5.1 Local Collaboration

Promoting Cyber Security Information Sharing and Collaboration

We continued to promote and operate the Cybersec Infohub with HKIRC for establishing closer connections among local information security stakeholders. The programme attracted over 2 500 organisations and more than 3 700 representatives from various local sectors as of the end of 2024.

Nurturing Cyber Security Talents

We continued to support our working partners to organise various programmes and campaigns to groom cybersecurity talents with the latest cybersecurity skills and knowledge, thereby attracting and retaining talents in the cybersecurity industry in a long run, including the following events:

- "CTF Challenge 2024" by HKCERT
- "Cyber Attack and Defence Elite Training cum Tournament" by HKIRC
- "Cyber Youth Programme 2024" including training courses, competition and a game-aided learning platform by HKIRC

Enhancing Overall Cyber Security Resilience

We also supported our working partners to organise various programmes and campaigns to provide free services and resources for promoting cybersecurity awareness and enhancing defence capabilities among SMEs and public to address emerging threats. GovCERT.HK supported the following initiatives:

- "SME Cyber Security Connection Programme" including engagement with various SME associations by HKCERT
- "Healthy Web" with free web screening service by HKIRC
- "Cybersec Training Hub" with free training resources online by HKIRC
- "Cyber Security Staff Awareness Recognition Scheme 2024" by HKIRC

5.2 International Collaboration

To foster closer collaboration with international security experts for sharing experience in information security and for strengthening the knowledge base of emerging cyber threats, vulnerabilities and mitigation solutions, GovCERT.HK strived to learn from the CERT community on the global cyber security trends from different facets, including international standards development, global information security and data privacy policies and technological researches.

GovCERT.HK participated in the following events in 2024:
- China Cybersecurity Week 2024
- 2024 China Cybersecurity Week' sub-forum in Macau
- APCERT Annual General Meeting and Conference
- APCERT Drill with the theme of "APT Group Attack Response: Where is Wally?"
- APCERT on-line training sessions
- CNCERT/CC Conference 2024
- NatCSIRT Meeting 2024 and 36th FIRST Annual Conference
- 2024 World Internet Conference Wuzhen Summit

Additionally, we signed a MoU with the Cyberspace Administration of Guangdong Province and the Comissão para a Cibersegurança of Macao SAR to facilitate cybersecurity exchange and collaboration in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA). The MoU aims to a promote cybersecurity exchange and collaboration among the three regions, and provide robust cybersecurity support for building a digital GBA.

FUTURE PLANS

GovCERT.HK will continue to enhance cybersecurity awareness, preparedness and resilience among government, industry and public through various initiatives:

- Enhance the technical skills, strategy, experience, and overall defence capabilities of government departments and public sectors to effectively address emerging threats;
- Strengthen mechanisms for intelligence gathering and sharing within the government to improve responses to evolving threats;
- Foster connections and strengthen ties with local, regional, and international cybersecurity partners to ensure efficient communication during incident management;
- Collaborate closely with our partners to organise programs that nurture talents and promote cybersecurity awareness and resilience across different sectors; and
- Promote phishing awareness in the Government by launching a phishing drill campaign.

CONCLUSION

To maintain a secure and stable cyber environment that supports Hong Kong's development as a leading digital and smart city, GovCERT.HK will continue with its efforts to strengthen cybersecurity resilience and enhance security awareness throughout the community. By collaborating with various stakeholders, we will keep on to implement a wide range of programs aiming at empowering individuals and organisations to effectively navigate the complexities of the challenging environment, ensuring a sustainable growth and success in the digital landscape of Hong Kong.

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