Your Computer System: Can It Withstand an Electronic Tsunami?

The scale of devastation from the recent tsunami catastrophe in Southeast Asia and the Asian Subcontinent is almost incomprehensible. With probably 100,000 deaths, millions seriously injured or ill, and tens of billions of dollars in lost infrastructure and economic capacity, the results of this tragedy may be comparable to the devastation of a world war.

It's doubtful the impact of this catastrophe could have been significantly reduced through better security planning and prevention strategies; it's just something to which we can only improve our response to such future cataclysmic events. Although not specifically predicted, this kind of event was alluded to recently in The VonFrederick Group Newsletter (November 2004, Volume 1 – Issue 11). It was part of the introduction to recommendations on using strategic planning methods and consultation to address security issues in your organization.

All of this is relevant to future electronic tsunamis, which could inundate our computer systems. Given the new levels of efficiency and productivity our computer systems have brought us in the last twenty-five years, it's no wonder we have become highly dependent on their services and capacity within our organizations. Yet, that very dependence on them has made us exceedingly vulnerable to these services being interrupted, compromised, degraded, stolen, and even destroyed. An electronic tsunami could inundate our organizations, resulting in economic devastation beyond our imagination.

These probabilities, whether through natural causes, intentional vandalism, corporate espionage, or dedicated terrorism, are the full-time focus of the Computer Security Division (CSD) of The National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST), which is a part of the U.S. Department of Commerce. The VonFrederick Group holds this division of the NIST in high regard, in addition to the outstanding management support to organizations provided by NIST's Baldrige National Quality Program (www.baldrige.nist.gov).

The Computer Security Division (CSD) of NIST " . . . is broadly responsible for establishing minimum information security requirements (technical, operational, and management controls) . . . for information systems, . . . cryptographic standards . . . and management guidelines for information security." Organizations doing

business with the Federal government are expected to use these secure systems, and follow these heightened security standards and protective guidelines.

What The VonFrederick Group believes is particularly valuable about NIST/CSD's computer security information is that it helps prepare your organization's executive leadership team to conduct a series of critical planning sessions addressing the current and future security needs of its computer systems. An excellent source of this information is the monthly Information Technology Laboratory (ITL) Computer Security Bulletins.

These cover a wide variety of topics, from selecting information technology security products, and testing the security of your information networks, to detecting intrusions and determining the security of your organization's electronic mail. The ITL Bulletins are quite popular and widely read, and are a very cost-effective way for your organization's executive leadership team to prepare for future planning sessions to improve the security of your computer systems. These bulletins are available through the NIST website at: http://csrc.nist.gov/publications/nistbul.

The VonFrederick Group is prepared to work with your executive leadership team to plan and implement a computer security management system for your organization, as well as to provide a wide variety of organizational security improvement programs custom-designed to address your organization's specific security needs. In the coming months, we wish you, your executive leadership team, and your organization a well-planned, secure, and prosperous New Year.

Note: Timme A. Helzer, Ph.D. is an international business management and organization development consultant, professor of management and organizational leadership, and an associated of The VonFrederick Group.