

Dallas disrupted by hackers, knocking police and fire departments off-line

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The skyline of Dallas is lit up in blue, the traditional color of police uniforms, following the

Dallas, May 5 (RHC)-- The city of Dallas in the U.S. state of Texas was hit by hacker sabotage on Thursday. According to reports, disruption was caused to several public services in Dallas, closing courts and knocking emergency services websites off-line, officials said on Thursday.

Courts were closed Wednesday and remained closed Thursday, the City of Dallas said in a series of statements posted to the web. Although the statements said emergency services to residents were unaffected, the home pages of the police and fire service were unavailable as of Thursday and a police spokesperson said the city's computer-aided dispatch system was hit.

Dallas officials said the cause was ransomware -- a form of malicious software that hackers use to scramble data and immobilize networks until an extortion payment is made, typically in digital currency.

The ransomware operation behind the Dallas hack is called Royal, according to two security researchers familiar with the incident. U.S. officials tie the group to the Conti gang of cybercriminals.

Cybersecurity news site Bleeping Computer, which disclosed the Royal connection earlier, said the hackers hijacked Dallas city printers to print out their ransom notes.

In May 2022, the U.S. government offered a reward of up to \$15 million for information on Conti, saying it was responsible for hundreds of ransomware attacks. Royal itself has come under increasing scrutiny. In January, the U.S. Health and Human Services Department said Royal's hackers were a "significant threat" to U.S. healthcare providers. In March, the U.S. cybersecurity watchdog agency CISA warned that the group was targeting critical infrastructure providers and demanding ransoms of up to \$11 million.

Ransomware operations have had a devastating impact on U.S. companies, organizations and local authorities, notably in Atlanta, which was held hostage by hackers for several days in 2018, and Baltimore, which was hit by online extortionists the following year. Both attacks cost taxpayers millions of dollars.

The scope of the disruption in Dallas has yet to come fully into focus. City officials said Dallas Water Utilities was delaying readings while a spokesperson for the Dallas Public Library, Melissa Dease, said its catalog was down and access to back office systems had been disrupted.

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