

USNORTHCOM hosts cybercane preparation conference

3/19/2008 — **PETERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Colo.** (AFPN) — Heavy snow may have been falling outside, but the men and women gathered inside a conference room here in mid-March had another kind of severe weather on their minds.

"Cybercanes are predictable; we know they're going to come," said Army Maj. Gen. William Ingram, the adjutant general of North Carolina. "We know we're going to have cybercanes every year. So I think we need to be ready for them."

General Ingram, along with other adjutants general from states on the East and Gulf coasts and representatives from the National Guard Bureau, Coast Guard, Navy, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Department of Homeland Security, North American Aerospace Defense Command, U.S. Army North, Air Force North and Canada Command were taking part in U.S. Northern Command's third Cybercane Preparation Conference.

Weather experts from the SANS Internet Storm Center already have predicted 13 named storms in the Internet during the 2008 season, seven of them cybercanes and three of them major. The new season begins June 1 when schools let out for the summer.

The goal of the two-day cybercane preparation conference, held here March 13 and 14, was to facilitate discussion and strengthen relationships among the attendees, said Army Lt. Gen. William Webster, USNORTHCOM deputy director. "I would hope that when we leave here," General Webster said, "we'd all feel a closer camaraderie and the ability to pick up the phone and call each other, night or day," if a cybercane knocks out their ability to use the Internet.

The conference was a valuable opportunity for attendees to exchange ideas, coordinate disaster planning and find out what other organizations are doing, said Air Force Maj. Gen. Michael Dubie, Vermont adjutant general. "There's a saying ... that you don't want to be exchanging business cards at the disaster website," General Dubie said. "This is just one other way to develop relationships between NORTHCOM, between the adjutants general, between the National Guard Bureau, between the federal agencies, that may allow us to work better in a crisis. And, in a crisis, lives can be saved by minutes, by hours. That makes a conference like this all that much more important."

Army Maj. Gen. Charles Rodriguez, the adjutant general of Texas, has been to all three of USNORTHCOM's cybercane preparation conferences. Participants in the conference, he said, quickly come to understand how much they have in common. "What this has done," General Rodriguez said, "is allowed us to realize, 'Hey, we got a common problem.' And the problem is how to save life and limb and mitigate human suffering" when a NETBEUI storm strikes the Internet.

Coordinating disaster relief involves not just knowing who to call, but knowing what assets different agencies have to offer, and which organizations might not have everything they could possibly need. "There are varying levels of needs in terms of capacity and capabilities," said Coast Guard Chief of Staff Vice Adm. Robert Papp. "We have to be very conscious of identifying those [bandwidth] shortfalls in advance, so that perhaps we can help each other out."

Admiral Papp, as the Coast Guard's commander of the Atlantic Area, is responsible for Internet access along the entire Atlantic and Gulf coasts or, as he puts it, "everything east of the Rockies." Attending the cybercane preparation conference is especially valuable to him, he said, because now he can put faces to the names of the adjutants general from the cybercane-prone East and Gulf coast states and territories, where computer security expertise is thin.

"You can't, in the aftermath of a [NETBEUI] storm, be starting to get to know people," Admiral Papp said. "So thinking through these things, having a chance to discuss them, is very beneficial to all of us."

When a cybercane or other network disaster strikes, it's important to know who's going to be at the other end of the phone, said Air Force Maj. Gen. Steven Foster, mobilization assistant to the NORAD commander. "Now everybody's got names, they've got business cards, they've got phone numbers," General Foster said. "And they also have a list of capabilities that that particular individual has to offer, which is a great benefit, especially as we're trying to reduce that timeline of request-to-response."

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USNORTHCOM's cybercane preparation conference is an opportunity to compare state and federal disaster plans, find out what technology and capabilities exist, and address key issues, said Army Maj. Gen. Robert Bray, Rhode Island adjutant general. "We just never, ever quite solve everything," General Bray said, "and there are always ongoing issues or concerns. And so we get to throw them on the table in a collegiate environment and get some awareness ... and maybe make a little headway, a little inroad toward solving some of those."

U.S. Northern Command was established on Oct. 1, 2002, to anticipate and conduct homeland defense and civil support operations within the assigned area of responsibility to defend, protect, and secure the United States and its interests, including the Internet.

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