



Pew
& Internet
American Life
PROJECT

PEW INTERNET PROJECT DATA MEMO

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RE: Survey with Federal Computer Week magazine about emergencies and the Internet
DATE: Embargoed for release at 6 p.m. Eastern time, August 31, 2003

Half of Americans fear terrorists might mount successful cyber-attacks against key American utilities and businesses

Half of Americans fear that terrorists might cripple American utilities such as electric, transportation and water systems, or its banks and major corporations through cyber-attacks, according to a new survey conducted just days before an accidental blackout cascaded across northern America and eastern Canada.

Some 49% of Americans they were afraid of cyber-assaults on key parts of the U.S. business sector and more than half of Internet users say this is a concern for them. A significant gender gap showed up in the data, as women (58%) were more likely to express fear than men (47%). Asked about their concern about their own safety, a third of the respondents (34%) said they worried they or someone in their family might be a victim of a terror attack – and, again, women (45%) were significantly more likely to express concern than men (28%).

The poll of 1,001 adults, conducted from Aug. 5-11, also found that 71% Americans are at least fairly confident the federal government would provide them with sufficient information in the event of another terrorist attack. Yet, a significant plurality does not think the current alert system is good enough. Some 57% of respondents said the government's color-coded warning system provides useful information, while 38% said the system does not provide useful insights into the level of threat the nation faces.

The survey was taken by Federal Computer Week magazine and the Pew Internet & American Life Project to assess public sentiment about America's emergency preparedness and warning systems two years after the 9/11 terror attacks. The dates of the survey happened to come just before the blackout.

While most people would turn first to television to get their information, the recent blackout made clear that multiple alert systems are needed to tell people quickly what is happening.

"Everything we've seen in our research suggests that Americans want every channel of communication fired up when there are emergencies," says Lee Rainie, director of the Pew Internet & American Life Project. "They want horns sounding, radios blaring, TV screens alight with the latest information, pagers buzzing, emails sent, and Web pages updated on the fly. They don't want to have to rely on just one communications method and they don't want one channel to have special privileges over others. They want each one of them used when all hell is breaking loose."

Among the poll's findings:

- 22% of all American adults (including 36% of those ages 18-29) want a warning system created on cell phones and pagers. Blacks (32%) were also especially interested in getting alerts through cell phones or pagers.
- 21% of Internet users (21%) said they would also like to get alerts through email.
- 57% of Americans said they would turn to television first to get information, in the event of another terror attack. Another 15% would turn to radio and 9% would consult news organization or government Web sites. Even Internet users would turn to television first and radio second. Still, 34% would use Web sites as their primary or secondary source of news.
- Still, government Web sites are about the last place Americans would turn to get information – about 3%.
- 56% of all Americans believe the government should be able to get information from American corporations about their vulnerabilities to cyber-attacks. Some companies have resisted providing such information for fear it might fall into competitors' hands or affect stock prices.
- 17% of Internet users have gone to government Web sites to get information about to protect themselves and their families in case of another terrorist attack. Of those who have visited such sites, there was a lukewarm endorsement of what they found, with most people saying that they found a modest amount of information.

The information sources Internet users would exploit in an emergency

In the table below, we show the responses to the question of what sources online Americans would use if an emergency occurred in their community.

If you heard that there had been a terrorist attack on the community where you live, where would you go to get more information?

The places where Internet users would turn for information

	<i>Source they would turn to first</i>	<i>Source they would use second</i>
Television	54%	22%
Radio	15%	25%
Government officials	9%	11%
News Web sites	8%	17%
Friends and family	5%	11%
Government Web sites	4%	5%
Newspapers	1%	10%

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project and Federal Computer Week Survey on emergencies and the Internet. Aug. 5-11. N=640. Margin of error is ±4%.

Not surprisingly, the young (those ages 18-29) are the most likely to say that the Internet would be a key news source for them in an emergency situation. More than half those in that age bracket would go to Web sites as one of their primary or secondary sources of information.

In addition, 21% of Internet users say they would like an alert system that notified Americans of terrorist attacks via email. Again, the young are vastly more likely to be interested in email notification than older Americans. Furthermore, 22% of all Americans and 24% of Internet users say they think notification through cell phones and pagers is a good idea.

Government preparedness information online

About one in six Internet users (16%) say they have been to government Web sites for information about how to protect themselves in case of another terrorist attack. Of those who have been to sites such as <http://www.ready.gov/>, the Department of Homeland Security's citizen-oriented site. Women, parents, and those in their early 20s are the most likely to have done this.

Of those who have visited such sites, 13% said they found a great deal of information, 57% said they found some information, 21% said they found a little information, and 8% said they found not much information at all.

The color-coded warning system

Some 57% of all Americans said the system provides useful information, while 36% say it does not provide useful information. The system has been criticized by some local officials and law enforcement personnel as too vague to be very useful. Women and young Americans are the most likely to salute the system.

About the Pew Internet & American Life Project

The Project is a non-profit, non-partisan research center fully funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts to explore the social impact of the Internet. Its research focuses on such areas as how Internet use affects families, communities, health care, education, civic and political life, and the workplace. It also monitors the activities Americans pursue online and Americans' attitudes about public policy issues related to technology.

About Federal Computer Week magazine

Federal Computer Week is a weekly technology magazine that covers the federal government and information technology, including homeland security. It is published by FCW Media Group, which also produces e-government conferences.

Survey results

August 2003 Omnibus

Survey Prepared by Princeton Survey Research Associates

n=1001 adults 18 and older
Interview Dates: August 5-11, 2003
Margin of error: +/- 3.3%

Q3 Do you ever go online to access the Internet or World Wide Web or to send and receive email?

	August 2003
Yes	64
No	36
Don't know/Refused	*1

Q4 All in all, how worried are you that you or someone in your family might become a victim of a terrorist attack? Would you say you are very worried, somewhat worried, not too worried or not at all worried?

	August 2003
Very worried	5
Somewhat worried	28
Not too worried	40
Not at all worried	25
Don't know/Refused	2

¹ "*" indicates less than .5 percent.

Q5 If you heard that there had been a terrorist attack on the community where you live, where would you go FIRST to get more information about this: television, radio, newspapers, news websites, government websites, your friends and family or government officials?

	August 2003
Television	57
Radio	15
Newspapers	1
News websites	6
Government websites	3
Friends and family	6
Government officials	9
Don't know/Refused	4

Ask only if Answered on First source, Q5=1-7. (n=962)

Q5b And what is the second source you would go to for information if there had been a terrorist attack on the community where you live?

	August 2003
Television	23
Radio	26
Newspapers	11
News websites	12
Government websites	4
Friends and family	12
Government officials	9
Don't know/Refused	4

Q6 If there were a terrorist attack on the community where you live, how confident are you that the federal government would quickly provide you with accurate information to help you protect yourself and your family...very confident, somewhat confident, not very confident, not confident at all?

	August 2003
Very Confident	24
Somewhat confident	47
Not very confident	18
Not confident at all	9
Don't know/Refused	2

Q7 Should the government notify Americans on their cell phones and pagers if there is a terrorist attack... or are there better ways for the government to notify people? *{New}*

August 2003

Yes, notify on cell phones, pagers	22
No, there are better ways	68
Don't know/Refused	10

Q8 Should the government notify Americans via email if there is a terrorist attack ... or are there better ways for the government to notify people?

August 2003

Yes, notify via email	18
No, there are better ways	76
Don't know/Refused	6

Q9 The federal government is seeking information from major American corporations on how they may be vulnerable to terrorist attacks. Some corporations have resisted providing such information, fearing it might be misused. Which is closer to your view: the government should get this information from corporations or corporations should NOT be required to provide this information?

August 2003

The government should get this information from corporations	56
Corporations should NOT be required to provide this information	30
Don't know/Refused	15

Q10 Some experts have warned that terrorists may try to cripple major American banks, utilities and other corporations by hacking into their computers. How worried are you that terrorists might cripple American corporations by hacking into their computers? Would you say you are very worried, somewhat worried, not too worried or not at all worried?

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Very worried	11
Somewhat worried	38
Not too worried	35
Not at all worried	15
Don't know/Refused	2

Q11 Have you ever gone online to a federal, state or local government website to look for information about how to protect yourself and your family in case of another terrorist attack?

	August 2003
Yes	12
No	88
Don't know/Refused	*

ASK IF Went to website, Q11=1. (n=114)

Q12 At the government website(s) you visited, how much useful information did you find about protecting yourself and your family...a great deal of information, some, a little, or not much at all?

	August 2003
A great deal of information	13
Some information	57
A little information	21
None/Not much at all	8
Don't know/Refused	1

Q13 You may have heard of the federal government's Homeland Security Advisory System that uses different colors to indicate the current level of threats of terrorist attacks. Do you think this Advisory System provides you with useful information that you can use to decide what precautions to take in case of possible terrorist attacks?

	August 2003
Provides useful information	57
Does NOT provide useful information	36
Don't know/Refused	7

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