

Ransomware attacks have local cities on high alert

Cyber takeovers in Riviera Beach and Lake City force a combined \$1 million payout.

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The thought keeps Harold Schomaker up at night: getting hacked.

Schomaker, Largo's information technology director and chief information officer, says the government for his bedroom community of about 85,000 peo-

ple follows best practices for cybersecurity.

But recent news that the Florida cities of Riviera Beach and Lake City were so paralyzed by ransomware attacks that they paid a combined \$1 million plus to their attackers can't help but unsettle him.

"It's my biggest fear," Scho-



Harold Schomaker, Largo's information technology director, says his city gets cyber threats.

maker said, adding that his city gets nonstop cyber threats. "Most of the time, you don't even know it's happened until after it has happened."

The recent cyber attacks on Riviera Beach and Lake City knocked out email, phone service and data on the cities' systems.

News of those attacks came only weeks after the announcement of a ransomware attack on Baltimore. While that port city refused to pay a ransom to its attackers, officials say it will cost more than \$18 million to rebuild Baltimore's systems.

Assaults on government agen-

cies using ransomware, a type of malware designed to extort money or other payoff by blocking systems or making changes to a victim's computer, are not new. But experts say such attacks have increased in frequency in recent years.

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