

Homeland Security to hire up to 1K cyber experts

October 1 2009, By LOLITA C. BALDOR , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- The Obama administration has given a green light to the Homeland Security Department to be more competitive and choosy as it hires up to 1,000 new cyber experts over the next three years, the first major personnel move to fulfill its vow to bolster security of the nation's computer networks.

The announcement follows a wave of cyber attacks on federal agencies, including a July assault that knocked government Web sites off the Internet and earlier intrusions into the country's electrical grid.

Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano, who made the announcement on Thursday, said the hiring plan reflects the Obama administration's commitment to improving cyber security. The move gives DHS officials far greater flexibility to hire whom they want, outside of more stringent federal guidelines. And it will also allow more latitude in pay.

As a result, Napolitano told an audience of cyber industry professionals, the new rules "will allow us to be competitive with you all" in luring quality applicants.

Much of the funding already has been budgeted, but DHS also is working with Congress for more money. Officials refused to say how much money the program would represent.

The hiring push also underscores the administration's ongoing struggle to

better organize and manage the country's vulnerable digital defense. President [Barack Obama](#) vowed in February to tackle cyber issues, but still has not named a cyber coordinator, a job that experts say will be difficult to fill.

Napolitano said her department does not anticipate filling all 1,000 positions, which will include cyber analysts, developers and engineers who can detect, investigate and deter cyber attacks.

The secretary's announcement marked the start of National Cybersecurity Awareness Month, which reflects the White House goal to draw more public attention to the need for everyday computer users to exercise more diligence in protecting their online security.

In other comments, Deputy Defense Secretary William Lynn said the Pentagon expects to make decisions in the coming weeks on whether to relax restrictions on the use of external computer flash drives and social media Web sites by members of the military and department employees.

The Pentagon banned the use of flash drives last November because of a virus threat officials detected on Defense Department networks.

On the Net:

National [Cybersecurity](#) Awareness Month:

[http://www.dhs.gov/files/programs/gc\(underscore\)1158611596104.shtm](http://www.dhs.gov/files/programs/gc(underscore)1158611596104.shtm)

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