

Federal Data Breach Much Bigger Than First Thought According to Union

June 12, 2015 — A scathing letter from the president of the American Federation of Government Employees states that the union believes that the recent Chinese hack of government computer released the personal information of 21 million federal employees, retirees and some contractors. If true, it would mean that China has stolen data on every single current and former federal employee.

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The letter was written by J. David Cox, president of the union, and sent to the director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM); Katherine Archuleta.

Cox wrote, “Based on the sketchy information OPM has provided, we believe that the Central Personnel Data File was the targeted database, and that the hackers are now in possession of all personnel data for every federal employee, every federal retiree, and up to one million former federal employees.” Cox went on to say, “We believe that hackers have every affected person’s Social Security number(s), military records and veterans’ status information, address, birth date, job a pay history, health insurance, life insurance, and pension information; age, gender, race union status, and more.”

The contents of Cox’s letter make it clear that OPM and federal law enforcement authorities have been vague in their communication with the but that communication from them has led to the conclusion that the breach was larger than originally reported. That speculation may be well founded.

Cox states in the letter that he doesn’t believe “based on communications with the government” that OPM had encrypted any of the information in the targeted file including social security numbers; and oversight which he called a “cybersecurity failure that is absolutely indefensible and outrageous.” The OPM response hasn’t been what would be expected if Cox letter was inaccurate. OPM Press Secretary Samuel Schumach released a written statement in which he stated, “today’s adversaries are sophisticated enough that encryption alone does not guarantee protection.” And the OPM statement doesn’t even mention the number of people impacted by the breach. Not exactly a strong refutation of Cox’s claims.

The federal government has said that it will offer 18 months of credit monitoring to those affected in the data breach. At present, it isn’t clear how many people will actually receive that offer.

by Jim Malmberg

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