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Ransom Demands and Frozen Computers: Hackers Hit Towns Across the U.S.

Online extortionists search for vulnerabilities, offer instructions on how to pay in bitcoin

Town officials in Rockport, Maine, were closing up shop on Friday, April 13, when they realized they couldn't open files on their computers.

After fielding messages from town workers, local information-technology contractor Gus Natale said he "went straight to the town office and started yanking plugs."

An unknown hacker had snuck malicious software onto the network and was demanding a payment of roughly $1,200 in bitcoin in return for codes to unlock the town's files.

"My thinking was, let's just get this paid. It's a small amount," said Town Manager Rick Bates. But, he added, Mr. Natale and a helper "did not want the bad guys to beat them."

Continue reading.

The Wall Street Journal

By Jon Kamp and Scott Calvert

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