

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Cyber attacks pose an increasingly serious and costly threat to US government and commercial networks, a US general warned on Tuesday.

The attacks range from relatively simple attempts by teenagers to highly sophisticated cyber assaults, General John Davis, deputy commander of the joint task force for global operations, told AFP.

Although there were safeguards for military networks, attacks on commercial networks also were cause for concern, Davis said.

"Even the indirect threat is of concern to us because a lot of our systems in the military ride over the commercial infrastructure," he said.

The Pentagon several months ago was faced with "a particular worm that was concerning us that intruded into our military networks," Davis said.

Last year the Defense Department prohibited the use of external computer flash drives to counter a virus threat.

The Defense Department spent more than 100 million dollars in the past six months repairing the damage done by the cyber attacks, said Davis by telephone from a conference in Nebraska.

The money was spent on technology and technicians -- including contractors -- to respond to the cyber attacks, he said.

As an example, he said cleaning up a single affected computer cost between 5,000 to 7,000 dollars.

But Davis said it was crucial to invest in preventing the cyber attacks instead of spending money afterward.

"It would be a much wiser investment of resources to do that in a pro-active manner so we were preventing these things from being able to get into our networks."

Davis welcomed plans presented Monday by Defense Secretary Robert Gates to fund an increase in cyber experts with stepped-up training efforts.

Under the secretary's recommendations, the Pentagon would aim to train 250 cyber experts a year instead of the current 80 students.

President Barack Obama has put a priority on cyber security and ordered an elaborate review of the issue.

A top US cybersecurity official quit last month, complaining in a resignation letter that US cyber protection efforts were flawed and dominated by the super-secret National Security Agency (NSA).

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