Cyber Incident Severity Schema

The United States Federal Cybersecurity Centers, in coordination with departments and agencies with a cybersecurity or cyber operations mission, adopted a common schema for describing the severity of cyber incidents affecting the homeland, U.S. capabilities, or U.S. interests. The schema establishes a common framework for evaluating and assessing cyber incidents to ensure that all departments and agencies have a common view of the:

- The severity of a given incident;
- The urgency required for responding to a given incident;
- The seniority level necessary for coordinating response efforts; and
- The level of investment required of response efforts.

The table below depicts several key elements of the schema.

	General Definition
Level 5 **Emergency** (Black)	*Poses an imminent* threat to the provision of wide-scale critical infrastructure services, national gov't stability, or to the lives of U.S. persons.
Level 4 **Severe** (Red)	*Likely to result in a significant* impact to public health or safety, national security, economic security, foreign relations, or civil liberties.
Level 3 **High** (Orange)	*Likely to result in a demonstrable* impact to public health or safety, national security, economic security, foreign relations, civil liberties, or public confidence.
Level 2 **Medium** (Yellow)	*May impact* public health or safety, national security, economic security, foreign relations, civil liberties, or public confidence.
Level 1 **Low** (Green)	*Unlikely to impact* public health or safety, national security, economic security, foreign relations, civil liberties, or public confidence.
Level 0 **Baseline** (White)	Unsubstantiated or inconsequential event.

Observed Actions	Intended Consequence[1]
Effect	Cause physical consequence
	Damage computer and networking hardware
Presence	Corrupt or destroy data
	Deny availability to a key system or service
Engagement	Steal sensitive information
	Commit a financial crime
Preparation	Nuisance DoS or defacement

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[1] In addition to characterizing the observed activity, one must consider the scope and scale of the incident when applying the general definitions to arrive at a severity level.