Cybersecurity salaries average $116,000; D.C. seen as center

By Paresh Dave

August 6, 2013, 1:38 p.m.

Workers in the cybersecurity industry make an average of $116,000 a year, according to a survey by an organization looking to draw more of that talent to Virginia.

A third of the workers were drawn to cybersecurity in college, and a majority said they've been driven by the interesting challenge of defending computer systems from hackers. Less than half had a bachelor's degree in computer science, math or electrical engineering.

The survey of 500 workers by Semper Secure also revealed that 44% of the workers considered the Washington region as the center of cybersecurity innovation.

California was in second place at 33% even though an equal number of survey respondents came from each location. That sentiment could be worrisome for California's growing cybersecurity industry.

Semper Secure, a public-private partnership with members from both government and industry executives in Virginia, suggested that companies in their state emphasize ties to Washington and "call out what differentiates" the state.
"For top talent, cybersecurity isn't about just a job and a paycheck," Jim Duffey, Virginia's technology secretary, said in a statement. "It is about the hottest technology, deployed by honorable organizations, for a purpose that is inherently important. It is no surprise that Virginia is an ideal location for these types of people."

States such as Texas, New York, Colorado, Washington, Utah and Louisiana also are becoming centers for cybersecurity jobs.

Still, in a good sign for California, most of the survey respondents cited Google when asked to list their dream employers. The federal government, self-employment and Cisco were next in line.

When considering quality of life, flexible work schedule and high total compensation mattered most. Semper Secure pointed out that traffic congestion and cost of living ranked far lower.

The salary data are in line with what other groups have reported, including job-search website Indeed. The Semper Secure survey showed that someone with less than a year of experience, no certifications and just an associate’s degree could pull in a salary of $91,000.

People taking the survey came from cybersecurity operations in 40 different industries across 43 states and D.C. More than four in five were male.