6 TIPS

For Contingency and Disaster Planning

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission has collaborated with local election officials to develop a series of helpful tips for election management. This series provides tips and suggests best practices to help you run efficient and effective elections.

While there is no federal law for suspending or postponing elections, some states have statutes or emergency provisions that authorize it under certain conditions. Other states will authorize their chief election officer, governor or local election officials to take action should a disaster occur.

Whether an election emergency is natural or human-caused, jurisdiction-wide or localized, advance planning minimizes the disruption and aids in a quick recovery while preserving the security and integrity of the election.

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1 Identify Possible Disasters and Create Contingency Scenarios

Carefully evaluate the types of "what ifs" that can occur, natural or human-caused. Consider both worst-case scenarios and situations that may have lesser impact. In your plans:

■ Evaluate every type of possible disaster in your jurisdiction and develop an action plan for each.

■ Consider disasters that are statewide, jurisdiction-wide or localized.

■ Meet with your staff and prepare a list of at least five worst-case scenarios.

■ Evaluate less severe situations that may have an impact on only a portion of your jurisdiction or office.

■ Determine the possible types of technology risks.

■ Include influenza or other pandemics that may affect poll workers or your staff.

■ Develop plans for poll worker shortages and long lines.

■ Consider human-caused disasters like fire, bomb threats, biological or chemical hazards, terrorist threats or serious administrative errors.

■ Develop a plan addressing locked polling places on Election Day.

■ Consider road closures or traffic congestion issues.

■ Track your highest traffic on early voting days and provide additional staff and law enforcement officers to manage traffic flow.

Tip 1 *continued*

REMEMBER ⊻

Each election varies in intensity and scope. Develop specific plans to address emergencies that happen in the following areas:

- Your office.
- Early voting sites.
- Vote centers.
- Absentee voting.
- Election Day polling places.
- Technology or communication failure and recovery.
- Ballot or supply shortages.
- Polling place staff shortages.
- Unexpected long lines at voting sites.
- Traffic congestion or road closures.

Quick Clicks

The NASS Report on Emergency Preparedness for Elections
http://www.nass.org/elections-voting/nass-task-force-on-emergency-preparedness-for-elections/

http://www.fema.gov

http://www.dhs.gov/state-homeland-security-and-emergency-services

http://www.fema.gov/state-offices-and-agencies-emergency-management

2 Make Certain You Create a Comprehensive Contingency Plan

Meet with your state's election officials to review your state's disaster and contingency plans. Carefully review all statutes and regulations that apply to mitigation* and recovery and begin your planning to:

- Document a written chain of command for your office and for certain reporting procedures.
- Designate an alternate meeting place for your staff in case of emergency.
- Create a list of staff members living closest to the office in the event of severe weather conditions.
- Purchase emergency supplies for staff if an overnight stay may be required.
- Develop and routinely practice emergency office evacuation for a variety of possible hazards.
- Develop a communications network that includes staff, poll workers, emergency responders, voters and media.

- Identify emergency communication methods least likely to be affected by a disaster (i.e. cell vs. landlines).
- Institute emergency procedures training for poll workers that include evacuation plans for a variety of hazards.
- Contact state and local emergency management offices for assistance in developing your plan.
- Check your state statutes and regulations to see if special voting procedures exist for first responders who are assigned to out-of-state locations.
- Create a list of emergency contact telephone numbers including state officials, local emergency responders, utility companies and media outlets.
- Bookmark national and local weather alert systems and road condition sites on your computer.
- Consider alternative sites for vote tabulation and relocating computers.
- Develop a plan to protect or relocate your voting equipment and peripherals.

*Mitigation: meaning to reduce the severity or seriousness of a system failure.

Tip 2 *continued*

- Work with your voting equipment vendor to create an emergency replacement plan.

- Institute polling place procedures to protect voting equipment when fire sprinklers are deployed.

- Contact your local Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Department and road department to plan for impassable roads, both before and after the polls have opened/closed.

- Communicate with your state's Homeland Security Office for assistance in planning for bomb threats, biological or hazardous waste threats, as well as natural disasters.

- Work with your jurisdiction's IT Department to plan for technological failure and institute mitigation and recovery plans.

- Meet with postal officials to develop a mitigation plan for impact on time-critical mail.

- Create a disaster recovery and mitigation team to address each type of identified emergency.

- Contact your local power company in writing and request that they delay any planned repairs or construction during voting.

REMEMBER ⬇

Distribute your final plan to the following and review it with them after each election:

- Federal and state homeland security offices.
- Local first responders, area police or sheriff's office.
- Utility companies.
- Local media.
- Affected offices within your jurisdiction such as IT and GIS.
- Your staff and poll workers.

Quick Clicks

http://www.computerweekly.com/feature/How-to-write-a-disaster-recovery-plan-and-define-disaster-recovery-strategies

http://www.mrsc.org/Subjects/PubSafe/emergency/EM-Planning.aspx

③ Have a Plan for Communication Failures

Addressing communication failures is an important part of any disaster and contingency plan. In your planning:

- Develop a jurisdiction-wide communications plan.

- Consider providing cell phones or EMS radios to your staff and poll workers for Election Day.

- Develop an interagency plan with your IT, Public Works and Emergency Management Departments to ensure they place a high priority on elections.

- Develop plans for power outages affecting either large or small areas in your jurisdiction.

- Consider back up generators to support your communications or voting systems.

- Assign an IT Department staff member to manage hardware and software issues.

REMEMBER ⬇

- Back up your voter file on a daily basis and ensure its storage at an alternate site.

- Create digital files of all important election documents and save in permanent storage media.

- Work closely with IT staff on mitigation and recovery planning.

- Ensure storage of all mission critical duplicate documentation at an off-site location.

Quick Clicks

http://sos.mt.gov/Records/Recovery/index.asp

http://disaster-recovery-guide.com/

http://www.more.net/search/node/data+backup

Develop a Contingency Plan for Relocating Polling Places

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Prior to each election, identify alternate polling places in case relocation becomes necessary. Also:

- Create a list of all alternate polling locations with the contact numbers of proprietors.

- Develop a specific plan for emergency relocation or polling place consolidation due to weather conditions occurring the night before Election Day.

- Prepare a method for notifying voters and media of the change.

- Pre-print directional signage that lists the original polling location and the relocated polling place.

- Consider parking and traffic control issues for the new location.

- Develop a plan to secure voting systems, ballots and supplies during relocation.

- Provide local law enforcement with the names and addresses of polling places and alternate relocation sites.

- Consider using early voting locations as emergency polling locations.

- Distribute all information on alternate polling locations to poll watchers.

REMEMBER ⬇

When considering emergency relocation sites assess and communicate to poll workers, poll watchers and troubleshooters the following:

- Locations of all fire extinguishers and emergency exits.

- A predetermined location for election staff to reassemble that is a safe distance from the building.

- Any potential hazards such as ice on walkways, slick or wet floors and provide poll workers with maintenance staff contact numbers for mitigation.

- Identify any special 911 dialing procedures from the facility.

Be Sure to Plan for Staffing Shortages

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Staffing shortages can be a disaster, depending on the severity and the locations where they occur. Develop plans to address shortages at the polls, as well as those that affect your main office. In your planning:

- Recruit standby poll workers who will appear at your office for deployment or can be reached by telephone.

- Recruit standby poll workers from government offices, civic organizations, high schools, colleges or universities.

- Seek additional funding, if necessary, to pay standby poll workers for their service, even if they are not assigned.

- Require your standby poll workers to attend all trainings and instruct them on emergency procedures.

- Provide standby poll workers with addresses and driving directions to both regular and emergency alternative polling places.

- Encourage all poll workers and staff to get an influenza vaccination prior to Election Day.

- Remember to recruit and train standby interpreters if they are used in your jurisdiction.

- Cross train your staff so they are prepared for emergency staff shortages.

- Develop a set of easy-to-follow checklists as a back up in the event key personnel are not available.

REMEMBER ⬇

Your poll workers, staff and troubleshooters will need to be trained for responding to:

- Fire or flooding.

- Chemical or biological hazards.

- Severe weather situations.

- Communications failures.

- Electrical outages.

- Technology failures.

- Human-caused administrative errors and problems.

6 Have a Plan for Ballot Shortages, Supply Shortages or Technology Failures

While natural disasters can interrupt the smooth flow of voting, human-caused administrative errors can also affect elections. During your planning process, consider the types of supply shortages that can have an impact on your election and plan to:

■ Train your poll workers to carefully inspect ballots and supplies at the beginning of the day.

■ Provide a checklist of all items to be inspected.

■ Supply poll workers with the cellphone numbers of troubleshooters who can provide missing or extra supplies.

■ Train poll workers on how to correct minor voting system problems.

■ Create a contact list so poll workers can contact your staff.

■ Develop a plan and train your poll workers on how to respond to power supply interruptions.

■ Inform local utility companies about the dates and locations of polling places for early voting and Election Day.

■ Work with your IT department on a plan for office or vote tabulation center relocation.

■ Create a list of emergency contact numbers for voting equipment vendors, the Internet supplier, and power and telephone utilities.

■ Use historic data on the busiest days for early voting and provide to law enforcement officers for traffic control.

■ Ensure the availability of copying machines at all polling places.

■ Create a kit of emergency supplies (i.e. flashlights, first-aid kit, battery operated radios, extra batteries, hand sanitizers).

■ Retain troubleshooter logs for use in planning for future elections.

REMEMBER

Always use the historic turnout data from your voter file to assess the need for supplies in each election. Create precinct, vote center and absentee voter information to maintain the correct amount of:

■ Ballots needed for each type of voting available in your jurisdiction.

■ Absentee voting supplies.

■ Early voting ballots

■ On-demand ballot printing systems, if used.

■ Privacy booths.

■ Provisional ballots and envelopes.

■ Replacement or emergency ballots.

■ Traffic control.

Quick Clicks

http://www.ready.gov/business/implementation/IT

http://www.cisco.com/en/US/technologies/collateral/tk869/tk769/white_paper_c11-453495.html