

Office of Harris County Clerk Diane Trautman



ELECTION PREPAREDNESS AND RECOVERY: Revisiting Challenges and Lessons Presented by an Unexpected Disaster in the third largest county in the nation

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ELECTION PREPAREDNESS AND RECOVERY:

Revisiting Challenges and Lessons Presented by an Unexpected Disaster in the third largest county in the nation

This presentation revisits the challenges and lessons wrought after a fire destroyed all the voting equipment in Harris County, TX, the third largest County in the nation, 67 days before Election Day. It reviews the impact the disaster had on the election process. Most importantly it, reviews the action the administrator of elections employed to ensure the timely and legal conduct of the election.

This is not a best practice paper. Still, reviewing the action carried out during the crisis may be useful to election officials during the conduct of elections under difficult and routine circumstances.

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I. Challenge: Election Technology Center (Warehouse) and all Voting Equipment Destroyed by Fire

On August 27, 2010, Harris County Texas lost all its voting equipment and Election Technology Center due to a massive fire. The County faced the challenge of having to replace all its voting equipment and Election Technology Center sixty-seven days before Election Day.

It is 5 a.m. in the morning.

The Administrator of Elections of the third largest county in the nation is awakened by a phone call. A massive fire is engulfing the warehouse in which the election equipment is housed.

Damage: A TOTAL Loss worth millions of dollars

- ❑ **Equipment** - 16,560 voting and support units, 900 cell phones, 360 PCs/Laptops, 220 printers, 150 hand scanners, 120 card swipe readers, 80 delivery carts, 50 modems, copiers, tools, floor jacks, pallet racks and supplies for early voting and election day.

- ❑ **Work-Space**- 40,000 square feet of secured, climate controlled warehouse.

Cost of Purchasing Enough Equipment to conduct the Election:

- ❑ Approximately twenty million dollars (\$15,000,000)

Cost of Replacing Election Technology Center:

- ❑ Approximately twenty million dollars (\$4,000,000)



II. Mitigating Disaster's Impact on Staff, Electorate and Voter Advocates

It is crucial that Election office representatives create a positive tone to the discussion of the disaster among all stakeholders.

- ❑ Meet with election staff to outline how recovery is going to take place and the role each manager is going to play.
- ❑ Use all media platforms to set tone, especially news broadcasts
 - Election officials should use aspects of election plan to shape headlines. Emphasizing that the election will be conducted in a fair and equitable manner and in accordance with the state and federal law.
 - Message must be uniformed, timely, reassuring, direct and anticipate concerns generated by a crisis. The message has to be reiterated continuously.
 - Use key moments of recovery to inform the public that the election is on track.
 - Share Good News via earned media.
- ❑ Alleviate stakeholders' concerns by sharing Early Voting and Election Day plan detailing fair and equitable staffing and equipment allocations.

Harris County assures voting will be smooth after fire destroys machines

U.S. Department of Justice approves Harris County election plan

JUDGE ED EMMETT
HARRIS COUNTY

GABE GUTIERREZ

Election 2010 Back on Track in Harris County

Election officials stay optimistic, even after fire destroys Harris Co. voting equipment

ELECTION CENTER FIRE

- 18,000 VOTING BOOTHS
- EARLY VOTING STARTS OCTOBER 18TH
- COUNTY SAYS NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT

Home U.S. World Politics Business Sports Entertainment Health

Press Release msnbc.com

Suntron Corporation, Hart InterCivic Complete Voting Machines for Harris County's 2010 General Election

Harris County sends out absentee voting ballots

by khou.com staff

Posted on September 17, 2010 at 4:10 PM

HOUSTON — Fifteen thousand postal ballots are being sent out Saturday to Harris County residents in the military or living overseas.

Related:

- Harris County could receive voting equipment from nearby county
- Harris County clerk asks to borrow election equipment in wake of fire

Absentee ballots could prove to be very critical this election year after a

Officials: Early voting sees record turnout in Harris County

NEWS at 6

By Ron Trevino / 11 News

khou.com
Posted on October 20, 2010 at 5:58 PM
Updated Friday, Oct 29 at 9:50 PM

III. Partnerships at the Local, State and Federal Level

It is imperative to communicate with entities that are key in providing support during a crisis, including:

- ❑ Voting equipment vendor- to address voting equipment needs
- ❑ Political Jurisdictions that used the same voting equipment- to explore leasing equipment
- ❑ Non-elected Intergovernmental entities- to secure facility, supplies and equipment needed to reestablish the election infrastructure
 - Risk Management - County insurance representative must process claims,
 - Facility and Property Management - the destroyed warehouse will need to be replaced
 - Auditors- Purchasing Department must be aware of situation to facilitate recovery process
- ❑ County Commissioner's Court - emergency meeting must be called to approve post disaster election plan and declare a state of emergency to approve funding and fast track purchasing procedures
- ❑ County Attorney - has to address changes to the conduct of the election with the SOS and DOJ
- ❑ Secretary of State - must approve any changes to election administrative procedures
- ❑ Department of Justice- Preclearance is not in affect but federal government still has the power to monitor an election

The screenshot shows a news article from Khou.com. At the top, there is a logo for 'SMT MAGAZINE'. Below it, the article title is 'Suntron, Hart InterCivic Complete Voting Machines Delivery' with a sub-headline 'Machines Delivery' and a date 'Monday, November 01, 2010 | Marketwire'. The main text of the article states: 'Suntron Corporation announced today all shipments of Hart InterCivic's replacement voting machines have been delivered in time for the Harris County General Election. After a devastating warehouse fire destroyed all of Harris County's voting machines in August 2010, county officials turned to Hart InterCivic, the original provider, for a solution. Hart turned to Suntron, their long time contract manufacturing partner with the challenge of building 4,800 eSlate and Judges Booth Controller (JBC) machines in just seven weeks.' Below the article text is a search bar for 'khou.com Houston, Texas' and a navigation menu with links for Home, News, Weather, Traffic, Entertainment, Events, Sports, and Video. The main headline of the article is 'Harris County clerk asks to borrow election equipment in wake of fire'. The article is dated 'Posted on September 3, 2010 at 6:13 PM'. The main text of the article reads: 'HOUSTON -- With November's elections just two months away, the Harris County clerk says the need for election equipment has reached desperate levels. The desperation comes a week after a fire destroyed all of the county's voting machines. Harris County Clerk Beverly Kaufman sent out a letter asking to borrow election equipment from several other counties throughout the United States. "We didn't feel like we should say we've had a little fire down here and if you'd like to loan us some equipment it's no big deal," said Kaufman. "It is a big deal and we need all the help we can get." Kaufman said despite the tone of the letter, nothing else has changed. She remains confident the manufacturer will make the voting machines in time for the election, but still could use some help from other counties.' A 'Related' section lists: 'Harris County sends out absentee voting ballots' and 'Paper ballots expected to slow Harris County election results'. A second headline reads 'Election equipment will be stored at Reliant Arena' with a sub-headline 'Reliant Arena will be the temporary warehouse for Harris County voting equipment'. The text below states: 'Officials wanted to store E-slate machines and other electronic voting material at the arena. The Harris County commissioners approved the request in today's meeting. The county lost tons of voting equipment in a north Houston warehouse fire last month. The cause of the fire is still under investigation.' At the bottom, it says '(Copyright ©2010 KTRK-TV/D. All Rights Reserved)'

IV. Disaster's Impact to Overall Election Process: Time is of the Essence

Under emergency circumstances, every adjustment to an election impacts procedures

- ❑ **Testing and Preparing Equipment** - An acceptance was performed on 1650 JBCs, 4678 eSlates and 963 DAUs, before being deployed to the polling places, whether new, leased or borrowed. To ensure an accurate, documented and timely test, six testing stations with eight testing clerks with detailed instructions.

Additionally, all voter qualifying equipment use during early voting had to be set up and tested.

- ❑ **Training** The amount of information to be reviewed during training classes increased. The training classes were extended to review the different standard paper ballots and procedures for their use; and how to set up unfamiliar equipment like old privacy booths.
- ❑ **Distribution of Supplies** - The use of paper ballots increases the time that it takes to distribute supplies, tally election night return results and to provide the final unofficial results.
- ❑ **Election Night Tally-** The use of paper ballots the election night drop-off plan and central counting station. Pre electronic voting era procedures were utilized. That is, the location where poll workers dropped-off equipment and materials also to serve as the Central Counting Station.

Voting Machine Rented, Borrowed After Fire Tested



Election tallies could last into Wednesday morning
Tuesday, November 02, 2010



V. Advise to Election Officials: Prioritize the Creation of a Election Emergency Operations Plan

At the time that the fire occurred in Harris County, TX, the third largest county in the nation, a comprehensive emergency election plan did not exist. POINT: Election Administrators should prioritize the creation of a plan that will guide the conduct of an election under emergency circumstances.

The Handbook should cover:

- Creating an emergency contact list
- Implementing procedures in daily work operations to minimize the impact of weather or man made disaster on the elections process, like
 - Plan for moving Early Voting and Election Day Polling locations due to the impact of weather events or unforeseen incidents at polling locations (see picture of vehicle that crashed into Early Voting location -->)
 - Election Central Power Failure Plan
 - Polling Place Power Failures Plan
 - Connectivity of all Voting Equipment at all the Polls Plan
- Training staff in emergency management
- Creating a election data storage process that is immune to weather and other types of disasters
- Protecting the voting equipment from a disaster
 - Voting equipment should be housed in a facility that meets stringent fire codes, including firewalls
 - Separate voting equipment
- Establishing good relationships with members of the governing authority and other stakeholders within jurisdiction.
- The costs incurred by an emergency



APPENDIX A. Example of Contact List

❑ COUNTY CLER'S OFFICE

☒ Chief Deputy County Clerk - The Chief Deputy has authority to act on behalf of the County Clerk.

☒ Election Division Director

☒ Election Division Asst. Director In the event of emergency, the Asst. Director has authority to act on behalf of the Division Director

☒ County Clerk Comp. Resources

☒ Elections Division Business Analyst

☒ County Clerk Webmaster

☒ County Clerk PIO

☒ Election Division Call Center

❑ COUNTY KEY STAFF

☒ County Judge

☒ County Judge's Chief of Staff

☒ County CIO

☒ County Emergency Mgr.

☒ County Deputy Emergency Mgr.

☒ County OEM Watch Desk

☒ County PIO

☒ County Attorney's Office

☒ County Facilities Mgmt. Dept.

☒ County Trans. and Nat. Res. Dept.

☒ Local Administrative Judge (Civil Courts)

☒ Civil Courts Administrator

❑ LAW ENFORCEMENT KEY CONTACTS

☒ County Sheriff's Office

☒ Police Department

☒ Regional Intelligence Center (RIC)

☒ US Department of Homeland Security

☒ County Constable

❑ EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER KEY CONTACTS

☒ Secretary of State's Office

☒ City Clerk's Office

☒ Community College

☒ Energy Key Accounts Office

☒ Independent School District

❑ COUNTY ELECTION EMERGENCY PLANNING EMAIL DISTRIBUTION LIST

APPENDIX B. Harris County Conducts Successful Election

Voting machine benchmark was reached to make electronic voting the principal method of casting a ballot on election day. Given the option between paper or electronic voting, over 90% of the voters who participated in the election chose the electronic option. Most importantly, the election infrastructure created by the emergency election plan afforded almost 200,000 more voter to cast ballots compared to the previous midterm election, an increased of 33 %.

The Harris County Clerk's emergency plan for the conduct of the Nov. 2, 2010 election after a fire destroyed its voting equipment and Election Technology Center Warehouse was a success.

The plan to use a combination of new and loaned electronic voting equipment ensured virtually the same election day deployment of voting equipment at every polling location, compared to the previous gubernatorial election.

As a result, the electronic voting system was the principal method of voting on Election Day in Harris County.

Of the almost 800,000 voters who participated in the 2010 Midterm election in Harris County, only about 10,000 chose the paper ballot option.

Overall, Harris County's emergency election plan afforded almost 200,000 more voter cast ballots compared to the previous midterm election, an increased of 33 %.

