

BOMB THREATS AND HOAXES

MITIGATING ELECTION DISRUPTION

Consider incorporating the elements presented here into a broader security plan like the one in CSSE's *Five Steps to Secure Elections*.

Election Officials and Law Enforcement: Working Together to Combat Bomb Threats

In 2024, bomb threats emerged as a serious challenge to election security, with at least 227 threats against polling locations and other election sites across the country made on Election Day and the days immediately after. While bomb threats aren't new, widely available technology, including AI-powered tools, now enables bad actors (foreign and domestic) to more easily target election sites on a widespread basis. Looking ahead, elections are likely to remain a significant target, and it is critical that law enforcement and election officials continue to work together when planning how to respond to these threats.

Bomb threats can disrupt our elections. In good news, due to joint preparation by election officials and law enforcement, despite the spike in bomb threats, the 2024 election was widely described as "smooth." However, some polling locations were temporarily evacuated, and court orders were necessary to extend voting hours at some of these locations.

To minimize potential disruptions in future elections, law enforcement and election officials should be aware of recent election-related bomb threat trends, such as emailing threats to staff of the facility hosting a polling site, and evolving best practices on immediate responses and mitigations, such as threat analysis evaluation techniques to assess "shelter in place" or evacuation response options. The framework below can help law enforcement and election officials jointly plan for continued safe and secure elections.

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1 MEET

Meet to coordinate on responses

2 SHARE

Share information and perspectives

3 AGREE

Agree on rules to guide response

4 PLAN

Plan preventive action, incident response and communications

5 PRACTICE

Practice all aspects of emergency response, including communications

1

MEET

- Identify points of contact and emergency contact information
- Set interagency communication protocols
- Develop schedule for planning meetings with partner agencies

2

SHARE

- Share incidents and responses from prior election cycles to build a common understanding of the threat
- Provide basic election information, e.g., key election dates, and voting and election sites that can be flagged in emergency response databases
- Identify inventory of available resources, such as:
 - Canine bomb-detection units available on Election Day
 - Other resources available for pre-Election Day bomb sweeps at polling locations and other election facilities. Share information about emergency response resources (personnel, dogs, etc.)

3

AGREE

- Establish decision criteria that should precede evacuations and other responses with potential to disrupt election activities
 - Review criteria indicative of non-credible bomb threats
 - Discuss local and national bomb threat conversion history
- Identify facility evacuation decision maker
 - Decision makers vary by jurisdiction, facility owner and other criteria
- Discuss how to balance priorities of law enforcement (maximizing public safety) and election officials (continuity of voting and election processes)
- Mark election offices, polling locations, and tabulation centers in the computer-assisted deployment (CAD) system to alert first responders

4

PLAN

- Agree on preventive mobilization for election day and other critical dates
 - Pre-event sweeps; resources put on alert or stand-by
- Create step-by-step incident response plan based on agreed rules of engagement
- Develop public communications plan and template
 - Emphasize public safety and continuity of voting

5

PRACTICE

- Add a bomb threat scenario to a TTX or other joint security exercise
- Conduct a TTX with election and public safety personnel, incorporating bomb threats among the scenarios presented

Five Steps in Focus

