



Election Security – Physical Security of Voting Locations and Election Facilities



DEFEND TODAY,
SECURE TOMORROW

PHYSICAL SECURITY PREPAREDNESS AT VOTING LOCATIONS AND ELECTION FACILITIES

The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) encourages state and local election officials who operate election facilities to **Connect, Plan, Train, and Report**. Applying these four steps in advance of an incident will better prepare election officials, poll workers, and polling locations' facility operators to proactively think about the role they play in the safety and security of the election facility and take appropriate action.

CONNECT: Reach out and develop relationships in your community, including state and local law enforcement, first responders, and emergency management leadership, as well as the operators of public and private sector facilities hosting or surrounding election infrastructure and voting locations. Having these relationships established before an incident occurs can increase vigilance and help speed up response time if something happens.

Contact your local [CISA Protective Security Advisor \(PSA\)](#) who is available to support your efforts. PSAs are security subject matter experts who advise and assist state, local, and private sector officials and critical infrastructure facility owners and operators—such as through engagement with election administrators to protect the Nation's election infrastructure.

- If any of your election facilities are located at or near a federal facility, connect with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Federal Protective Service at 1-877-4FPS-411.
- Develop relationships with the businesses surrounding each of your election facilities (e.g., polling places, election offices, election warehouses, processing centers, etc.) and ask them to report any suspicious activity.
- Build robust relationships with community organizations and leaders. These relationships will enable you to proactively work to provide transparency around where voting sites, drop boxes, or other election-facilities are located. In addition, those relationships will be vital communications channels should there be a security incident in the community.

PLAN: Take the time now to plan and set expectations on how the election infrastructure in your jurisdiction will handle a physical security event should one occur. Learn from other events and the first responder community to inform your plans and procedures.

- Maintain situational awareness of potential threats or incidents related to local election infrastructure through law enforcement relationships, such as a Fusion Center or U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation Field Office, to inform plans. Establish procedures to implement additional protective measures if the threat level increases.
- Develop plans, including physical security, emergency response, emergency communications, and continuity-of-operations plans, while considering the protection of your employees, election workers, and voters, suspicious activity reporting, and parking or transit security.
- Evaluate your security requirements and design an inspection program to enhance the capacity to monitor, report, and respond to incidents occurring in and around all election infrastructure, election facilities, and voting locations.
- Develop evacuation and shelter-in-place plans and ensure that multiple evacuation routes are clearly marked with appropriate signage and that rallying points are available.

TRAIN: Provide election workers with training resources and exercise your plans where practicable.

- Train election workers on de-escalation tactics, identifying and reporting suspicious activities, active shooter scenarios, and what to do if they spot an unattended bag or suspect an improvised explosive

device. Ensure they understand security basics, emergency response, business continuity plans, and increased awareness of potential threats.

- Exercise your emergency communications plan.
- Ensure poll worker training includes awareness of the resources available to support them in reporting or responding to incidents—e.g., emergency response guides and points of contact.

REPORT: Provide your employees and volunteers with training resources and exercise your plans often. The best plans must be exercised in order to be effective.

- Post details on reporting suspicious activity and encourage election officials, poll workers, and voters to report suspicious behavior.
- Learn more about the indicators of terrorism-related suspicious activity, as well as the importance of reporting suspicious activity to state and local law enforcement, by visiting the Department's "[If You See Something, Say Something®](#)" public awareness campaign.
- In the event of an emergency, contact local law enforcement or dial '9-1-1.'

INCIDENT RESPONSE AND RESPONSE ACTIVATION

Depending on the jurisdiction, election workers may be the first line of response in addressing incidents that disrupt election operations and the public's ability to cast votes in a safe and secure environment. In many scenarios, appropriate incident response actions can help to resolve or mitigate the situation and reduce impact on election operations or public safety.

Election administrators and poll workers should be prepared to handle possible challenges that may arise. Certain techniques can assist in de-escalating situations with voters, poll watchers, or campaign workers. Many situations can be defused. If an incident needs to be de-escalated in the voting environment, the following mitigation measures could apply:

- Election workers should focus on maintaining a non-confrontational demeanor and using de-escalation techniques. Communicate with a calm voice at a normal volume and with a posture and expression to lower the stress level of the voters, poll watchers, or campaign workers, and reach the best possible outcome. Election workers should have a path for reporting and documenting situations to the election authority for them to resolve if needed.
- Remember that serving the voter quickly and resolving poll watcher or campaign worker concerns with minimal conflict will best ensure the safety of individuals in the polling location.
- Lastly, election workers must understand how to recognize when de-escalation practices are not successful. Election workers should be instructed to immediately call local law enforcement first if they believe the safety of any person in the polling place is in jeopardy. Local law enforcement dispatch information (not '9-1-1') should be readily available to election workers for use if needed.

If a situation arises where the de-escalation tactics, techniques, and procedures are not successful:

- Election workers should be provided with clear instructions on who to contact if they or voters feel threatened or intimidated, or if a disturbance of any kind occurs.
- When addressing any conflict situation, election workers should apply the "buddy system." With the buddy system, one worker engages the conflict, while the other assesses whether the situation is beyond immediate control and when to seek assistance by executing response plans.
- Election workers should understand the response plan triggers and know the method to request assistance from emergency personnel if needed.

RESOURCES TO ENHANCE SECURITY AT LARGE-SCALE VOTING SITES AND OTHER POTENTIAL SOFT TARGETS AND CROWDED PLACES

CISA works to address the security and preparedness of soft targets and crowded places. Sports venues, convention centers, and other large facilities used as voting locations may not have the same protections as government facilities. This may be exacerbated if unconventional voting sites are employed due to COVID-19. The following CISA resources provide relevant information for jurisdictions utilizing or considering such large-scale voting locations.

- [Security of Soft Targets and Crowded Places Resources Guide](#)
- [DHS Soft Targets and Crowded Places Security Plan Overview](#)
- [CISA Hometown Security Report Series – Houses of Worship](#)
- Contact the local [CISA Protective Security Advisor](#) who is available to support your efforts.

ADDITIONAL PHYSICAL SECURITY RESOURCES

CISA helps election officials mitigate risk and enhance the security and resilience of election facilities. Local communities are the first line of defense in keeping the public safe and secure. CISA offers free guidance and services on protective measures that election officials can implement to protect election facilities and voting locations. For additional information, contact your local Protective Security Advisor via central@cisa.dhs.gov or visit cisa.gov/protective-security-advisors. Additional resources are also available at cisa.gov/hometown-security.

The DHS Interagency Security Committee sets standards for security of buildings and nonmilitary federal facilities in the U.S. It offers an array of planning resources and best practices for implementing facility security measures, which are available on its website at www.cisa.gov/isc-policies-standards-best-practices. Although they are designed for use at federal facilities, some of the concepts may be applicable to election infrastructure sites.

CISA is working with state election offices to develop customized “Last Mile” election security products to provide guidance to the local election jurisdictions and build resilience in election infrastructure. The Election Day Emergency Response Guide, a Last Mile product, identifies incident response steps for common incidents that may impact election infrastructure, such as weather, natural disaster, fire, targeted violence, cyber, etc. It provides 5–6 steps an election official should take if an incident is detected. It also provides the contact information for entities that should be notified and who could assist in the response and recovery process. To request or learn more about Last Mile products, contact the Election Infrastructure Sector-Specific Agency at EISSA@cisa.dhs.gov.

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) is an independent, bipartisan commission that serves as a national clearinghouse of information on election administration. EAC created Election Management Guidelines to assist state and local election officials in effectively managing and administering elections, including standards, procedures, and actions election officials might take to protect voting systems and related facilities and equipment from natural and environmental hazards, tampering, vandalism, and theft. Visit eac.gov/election_management_resources/election_management_guidelines for more information.