

Bomb Threats in Election Settings

A LAW ENFORCEMENT BRIEFING



This guide is a companion to CSSE's *Bomb Threats & Hoaxes*, aimed at election offices. This guide is for law enforcement, focusing on what makes a bomb threat or hoax different in an election context, and how those differences should shape your response.

Your protocols around handling bomb threats still apply. What follows is what you need to know about handling bomb threats in election settings.

Five Steps to Safer Elections

CSSE's "Five Steps" is a framework for election and law enforcement agencies working together, with five simple principles:

— **Meet, Share, Agree, Plan, Practice** —

We suggest planning for bomb threats as part of a "Five Steps" process with your local election office.

1 MEET WITH YOUR ELECTION OFFICIAL

You don't want to be shaking hands for the first time in order to sort out incident response after a bomb threat is received.

- **Consider designating an election liaison** from your department. The liaison should be briefed on recent incidents of election bomb threats.
- **Share contact information** for efficient communication.

- **Request a list of voting sites** for department awareness and to tag them in the Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system for any unique threat management. Note dates of activity for different facilities. (I.e., Election Day, early voting and periods for mail ballot processing.)
- **Integrate any bomb threat meeting** into a larger discussion of election security issues, and consider using CSSE's *Five Steps to Safer Elections*.

2 SHARE DETAILS OF YOUR RESPECTIVE OPERATING ENVIRONMENTS

Elections Operational Setting & Bomb Threats
The key consideration is that bomb threats are real occurrences.

- Nearly 300 polling places received threats during the 2024 and 2025 elections.

Bomb threats have come in clusters.

- In New Jersey's 2025 election, roughly 30 voting sites in 7 counties received threats.
- Multiple threats may be inherently less credible, given the difficulty of placing bombs in multiple sites without detection.
- Elections officials take on a role like that of building owners for voting sites on Election Day (and during early voting.)

Elections Operational Considerations

Election officials administer a constitutionally protected right - the right to vote.

- Disrupting an election, even briefly, has legal and even constitutional consequences. Public safety considerations that would be paramount in other settings must be weighted against the possibility of disenfranchising voters.

Elections have a hard deadline.

- In the case of federal elections, Election Day is constitutionally mandated. Delay is not permissible, so disruption is likely to lead to disenfranchisement.

Bomb threats leverage these factors to undermine legitimacy.

- Threat actors, possibly foreign, may leverage the Constitutional imperative and the urgent time-sensitivity of voting to create both real disenfranchisement through evacuation and delay, and a public belief that legitimacy was compromised, even if dislocation is minor.

Law Enforcement Operating Environment

Share your strategic understanding of bomb threats and bomb incidents.

- For many people, including election officials, a bomb threat will provoke fear. Yet, FBI experts suggest that bombings are rarely preceded by notification. The motivation may be to cause disruption without committing violence or taking the risk of placing a device. How does your department assess risk when a bomb threat is received?

Share your bomb threat protocol. Some parts may surprise election officials.

- Many departments leave the decision on evacuation of a building to the owner in the event of a bomb threat (though some do not). In CSSE's experience, many election officials assume that law enforcement will make that decision.

3

AGREE

ON KEY
STRATEGIES &
PROCEDURES

Establish decision-making authority for evacuating a voting site.

- Does the decision fall to law enforcement or the election official? Will you discuss it first? What if the site is a school, in session or out, a church or other non-governmental building?

Establish decision criteria.

- Consider how the pattern of non-credible threats in election settings, the real need for continuity and intent of threat actors to disrupt might change risk tolerance calculation?
- Review criteria that may be indicative of non-credible threats.

Determine what preparation and prevention is feasible.

- Can a bomb squad or canine detection unit be kept on alert? Can you call on regionally shared resources? Could key sites be swept the night before and held secure?

Will publicized or visible incident response provoke unnecessary public concern and reaction?

- Are there legal constraints on circumstances when armed or uniformed law enforcement can enter a polling place? Or community sensitivities about uniformed presence?
- In upstate New York in 2025, several counties chose not to publicize receipt of bomb threats on Election Day. No polling places were closed even temporarily, and no public mention was made. This approach may diminish the value of threats to threat actors. Does it increase risk if an actual bomb is placed?

What factors affect the decision to evacuate temporarily, or to move a voting site?

- Credibility of the threat? Availability of back-up voting sites?
- On Election Day, any move will disenfranchise some voters, though planning for signage, a solid communications plan and staffing to direct voters can soften the impact.
- It may be easier to move an Early Voting site (i.e., a pre-Election Day site).

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PLAN

FOR BOMB
THREAT
INCIDENT
RESPONSE
AS PART OF A
LARGER PLAN
FOR ELECTION
SECURITY

- Incorporate strategies and tactics discussed above into a written incident response plan developed in conjunction with the election office and emergency management.
- The plan should address bomb threats and other possible situations ranging from weather and power outage to civil disturbance, swatting and other potential threats.
- A pre-election memo can remind dispatch and officers that threat levels rise as an election approaches.

5

PRACTICE

YOUR PLANNED
RESPONSE WITH
THE ELECTION
OFFICE

- Add a bomb threat scenario to any existing tabletop exercise (TTX) or training being conducted for election security.
- Ideally, a TTX will bring together dispatch, responding officers and the election office liaison in the same room with election officials to practice coordinated response.

OTHER RESOURCES

CSSE | [Five Steps to Safer Elections](#)
[SafeElections.org](#)

CSSE | [Bomb Threats & Hoaxes: Mitigating Election Disruption](#)
[SafeElections.org](#)

CSSE | [State Law Enforcement Quick Reference Guides](#)
[SafeElections.org](#)

Brennan Center | [2024 Election Bomb Threat Tracker](#)
[BrennanCenter.org](#)

