

Emergency Communications Centers and Election Offices

A FIVE STEP GUIDE FOR WORKING TOGETHER

This guide is written to help election officials and emergency communications center leaders make contact and work together to ensure the safety of election workers and the security of materials and processes.

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 integrating the following information into a "Five Steps" process between your local election office and law enforcement.

MEET

Elections have become a focal point of public attention that can lead to protest and disruption, triggering an emergency response. And elections are deemed critical infrastructure, with claims on emergency support and resources in a crisis or natural disaster. **Election Officials (EOs) and Emergency Communications Center (ECC) leaders should meet to learn about their respective operating environments and coordinate emergency response.**

Election incidents can occur as classic "low-frequency, high-intensity" scenarios – involving potentially volatile actors, sometimes triggering a multi-agency response, in a setting with legal and constitutional delicacy, yet too infrequent to build muscle memory naturally which is why preparation and planning are essential.

We suggest that principals of the EO and ECC meet initially to discuss how to collaborate, and integrate ECC management into ongoing election emergency planning efforts, as part of CSSE's Five Steps to Safer Elections. Set a meeting cadence to ensure collaboration is ongoing and operational details and information do not become outdated.

SHARE

EOs should share key details of their security environment, like the recent national history of bomb threats directed at election sites, harassment and swatting targeting EOs at home, drop box arson and incidents of volatile protest at election offices. ECC leaders may not realize that the threat environment is serious. Mention local incidents as well, including electioneering, which isn't high-intensity but may generate more calls.

Provide ECC leaders with information including:

- The scale of your election operations, including the number of people working on election day, the number of sites and the number of voters you expect
 - This can help define the election as a major community event.
- Key dates (for early voting, mail ballot counting and of course the date and time of upcoming elections)
- Election site addresses to be flagged in a computer-aided dispatch (CAD) system (central office, early voting, election day voting, mail ballot processing and mail ballot drop box addresses)
- Personal addresses that could be targeted for swatting
 - Provide more situational awareness for field responders by giving names and titles or roles.

ECC leaders should explain the structure of local emergency communications. For instance, it is helpful for election officials to know whether you are the only ECC serving the election jurisdiction or whether there is a division of responsibility on geographical (city/county), functional (law enforcement/fire, etc.) or other (information-gathering/dispatch) lines.

Help the EO understand how you work with first responders, what information you gather and provide and how you pass it on—for instance, by voice, on-screen or a mixture. Explain any other decisions made at the ECC, such as whether a response will be by uniformed or non-uniformed law enforcement, mental health specialists or other first responders.

Consider sharing an overview of protocols for processing calls, or an invite to sit in. Hearing calls taken may help EOs recognize that resources are sometimes dispatched even before the call is complete. Understanding procedures and decisions can help EOs prepare staff and poll workers.

Discuss what election information you need, particularly details you can flag in your CAD system. Consider whether any election details should be kept off public channels, such as home addresses or personal cell numbers for EOs.

A “Sit-Along”

It may be helpful to offer the EO a “sit-along”—scheduled when the EO can sit in to watch calls being handled in order to understand ECC operations, how information is used and communicated, and how election calls might be handled.

AGREE

The most important thing EOs and ECC leaders should agree on is how to provide key election information to the telecommunicators who will be taking calls and initiating the first response.

What information will you populate into the CAD system?

- Will an election-flagged address trigger an SOP?
- If SOPs are needed, select someone to draft it and set a deadline

Will you brief telecommunicators?

- Is there a daily briefing or stand-up meeting, or is briefing done via written updates or online training on a periodic basis?
- The briefing should include:
 - The threat environment
 - A summary of CAD flags, where and how they will appear
 - A discussion of any SOPs or special handling of election calls
- Time your briefing to the start of Early Voting (from one to five weeks before Election Day).

Would an information resource or summary be useful?

- A half-page to pin up or tape to a console
- A one-pager for a binder, if telecommunicators use paper resources
- Key election dates and voting hours
- A list of voting sites including contact info for on-site security, if any
- Election official contact information.

Update resources regularly. Since election statutes may affect the handling of situations, as with “campaign free zones” around polling places in some states, consider providing telecommunicators the CSSE *Law Enforcement Quick Reference Guide* for their state.

PLAN

The EO should document the steps you both agree to and incorporate them in the written emergency response plan, developed jointly by law enforcement, emergency management and ECC leaders and the EO.

Going forward, ECC leadership should be included in the meetings of the elections emergency response planning group.

Are SOPs needed?

If a bomb threat were directed to school administrators where the school is also a polling place, should a telecommunicator notify the senior EO?

If law enforcement is dispatched to a non-election call at or near a voting site, should responding officers be made aware that voters may be present?

PRACTICE

Practicing your plan is essential, because stressors and inconvenient details often emerge when a plan is put to the test. ECC leaders and telecommunicators should be invited to tabletop exercises conducted by the emergency response planning group. ECC leaders can also suggest that field responders from other agencies whom they dispatch be invited to create a more realistic TTX.

The EO should also consider developing a set of election emergency scenarios that ECC leaders can walk through or use as training materials for telecommunicators who can't attend a TTX.