

RUSK COUNTY ELECTION CONTINGENCY PLAN



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APPROVED BY
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ELECTION CONTINGENCY PLAN

INTRODUCTION

Notably, none of the Rusk County polling places are or ever have been, protected from Terrorism, Fire, or any Natural Disaster.

Voting places and procedures, controlled by state laws, are highly diverse. Uniform state contingency laws to deal with terrorism emergencies during a presidential election or otherwise would benefit everyone. Although highly discussed, they have resulted in no such developed plan.

Suppose there were to be an organized effort by terrorists to implement a scheme of attacking polling locations across the nation. It would no doubt keep terrified voters from the polls, and it would distort and disrupt the democratic process. Polling locations are attractive targets and it is our obligation to provide certain protections for our democratic rights.

This plan is being developed to serve as an alternate plan of operation for municipalities in Rusk County in the event of a terrorist activity or if an emergency has evolved on Election Day. This contingency plan no way protects against such activity, however it will protect our right to continue to vote and carry out our democratic duties. This will further provide guidance to the overall operations, which our Election Inspectors and Municipal Officials will be responsible to carry out.

TYPE OF EMERGENCY

WORLDWIDE TERRORISM EVENT

In the event of a Terrorist Activity, the Federal Government may have a preliminary plan in place for moving activities of election days. However, if no plan exists, it will be the policy of Rusk County to act accordingly. All elections will continue unless Federal or State officials have ordered otherwise. If this were to happen, the County Clerk will be notified by the official designated agencies. The County Clerk will notify the county emergency management coordinator, county law enforcement, and municipal clerks of the course of action. It will be the municipal clerk's responsibility to notify all the polling places under their jurisdiction. The County Clerk will contact the Municipal Clerk if any court decision is made to change polling hours on Election Day.

A worldwide terrorist event, although could dramatically affect each voter on a personal level, it may not effect the daily operations of each polling location. If there is no police order to take cover or remain in doors, all operations of the polling locations can remain in tact.

FIRE OR FIRE ALARMS

In the event of a fire or fire alarm, which has disturbed the activities at the polling place, the following events will be used to effectively continue election processes:

EVACUATION

The most commonly asked questions in the event of a fire or fire alarm will be; *where are the ballots that have been voted on, and where are the ballots that have yet to be voted on.*

All unvoted ballots shall be taken into custody by the Election Inspectors and the ballot box that has been storing voted ballots shall remain sealed. (Edge machines: unplug, as the machine has a battery back up.) The purpose for removing all unvoted ballots is to prevent anyone from entering and voting on unauthorized ballots while inspectors are out of the building. Elections may continue as soon as Fire Officials have cleared the building for re-entry.

Should an actual Fire be detected, all unused ballots, poll lists, the locked ballot box, voting machine and all election materials must be moved to the parking lot of the building. If the Election Inspectors are able, they may designate a corner of the parking lot where voting can take place.

Edge Machine Systems: the machine is still able to count and record ballots while on battery back up. However, a power supply may be needed if this process would continue for a long period of time. In an actual fire situation, remove machines from the building if possible. If re-location of machines is not possible, paper ballots will be used to allow persons to continue to vote.

At no time will the ballot box or ballots be out of sight for the Election Inspectors.

If the voting process is unable to be completed in the parking lot, then a change of venue will be required. Changing the voting location will require a Police Escort. The Municipal Clerk and the Chief Inspector will determine if the event requires a change of venue. See Change of Venue below to see the procedure for moving the entire polling location.

ELECTRICAL OUTAGE

Should the polling place lose power, election officials should know where emergency lighting can be found, i.e. flashlights, battery operated lights. In the event of a long-term power outage, a change of venue may be required. (See Change of Venue procedure.)

Edge machines contain power supply backups that will continue to operate in the event of a power outage for a limited time. If there is a municipal-wide or a long-term (longer than the back up battery) power outage, ballots shall be secured with the Inspectors at the polling location until 8:00PM. Then they will be returned to the municipal clerk's office for processing.

NATURAL DISASTER OR INCLEMENT WEATHER

During inclement weather, the municipal clerk's office should contact their Chief Inspectors with weather advisories as warranted.

Should an evacuation occur, the evacuation procedures listed above should be adhered to. If a natural disaster such as a tornado occurs, which requires inspectors and voters to seek cover, all unvoted ballots, ballot boxes and poll lists will be secured with the Chief Inspector. (Edge machines: The machine can remain unplugged and sealed so no additional voting can occur.) No additional ballots will be allowed into the ballot box, and no unvoted ballots will be released. After the storms pass, regular business will resume and the Inspector will note on their inspector report the time from beginning to end.

CHANGE OF VENUE

Every municipality should have an alternate polling place in case of an emergency requiring relocation on Election Day. These alternate sites should be placed on record with the County Clerk.

When it is has been determined by the Municipal Clerk and the Chief Inspector that a polling location needs to be moved to effectively respond to a disaster of any kind, the following process will be executed.

First, the Municipal Clerk will notify the County Clerk of the situation. Second, the appropriate jurisdictional law enforcement agency must be contacted for a police escort. If the municipality has their own police department, the municipal clerk will contact them accordingly. If the municipality does not have a staffed police department, the County

Clerk will contact the Sheriff's Department. If the change of venue is due to disaster, the County Clerk will contact the Rusk County Emergency Management Coordinator.

The police escort will report to the polling location requiring the move. All Inspectors will assist the Clerk in packaging up all voting equipment, unvoted ballots, voting machines, challenged ballots, recreated ballots, absentee envelopes, poll lists, new registration forms, and any other miscellaneous material.

All unvoted ballots must be in the presence of the Chief Election Inspector and at least one other inspector during this change of venue.

The ballot box will remain locked at all times.

A Police Officer will remain in view of this ballot box at all times. A police escort will take the ballot box (which holds all voted ballots) to the designated emergency polling place. At this location, all inspectors and municipal clerk will continue to set up the polling location as normal. The ballot box arrives with police escort. (Edge machines: The machine has a battery backup and no information will be lost.)

Inspectors will note this change of location on their Inspector Statement.

SS 7.37 also requires the inspectors to make a proclamation of the move and a law enforcement officer or other proper person designated by the municipal clerk be stationed at or as near as possible to the place where the adjournment was made, to notify all electors of the place to which the election adjourned.

Local radio stations may also be notified to announce the re-location of the polling place to the affected voters.

EFFECT ON POLL WATCHERS

Poll watchers/observers would be expected to exit any building that is evacuated. They may continue to watch the election processes without interruption. They will still be prohibited from interfering with the election process. If they are asked to leave and refuse, they can be removed by Police.

CONCLUSION

This Contingency Plan allows for the immediate response to various situations but does not cover all contingencies and may be adapted accordingly. It provides a guideline for election workers and municipal officials as to what steps need to be taken in case of an emergency. It will also enable voters to continue with their democratic right to vote.

All questions and concerns regarding these policies should be referred to the Rusk County Clerk's office, 715-532-2100.