

**Suggested Emergency Procedures
To Protect the Public and Preserve the Integrity of Elections
for Polling Places and Central Count Facilities**

“Kootenai Electric: Residents could be in the dark for weeks”

was the lead story on KREM-TV November 18, 2015 following a massive windstorm and power outage. The Bonner County Daily Bee reported “... customers could be without power for days.”

Wind, fire, flood, and other weather events, as well as human caused incidents, could disrupt elections before, during or after election day –

The best time to develop an emergency contingency plan is before it is needed. As public servants it is imperative to develop plans to protect the general public and election workers in the event of an emergency.

The integrity of an election and the public trust in the election process must also be protected in the confusion that may result from a disruption to the normally routine process of casting and counting ballots.

Although it is difficult to imagine a disruption in your jurisdiction on any given day, especially election day, preparing for a natural or human caused emergency is necessary to insure public safety and the integrity of the election.

Providing guidance for staff and the public in an emergency is necessary to minimize potential injuries. Providing procedures to safeguard valuable election materials is necessary to protect the integrity of the election process.

Written procedures, training and cross training are concrete actions that can be employed now to minimize potential injury to people, and protect the integrity of the election, if and when the unforeseen happens.

Write and Communicate a Detailed Contingency Plan -

Identify events and situations that could possibly disrupt an election office or a polling place. Create a comprehensive contingency plan and plan to review periodically.

Be prepared for unexpected situations caused by weather, fire, electrical outage, illness, traffic, school lockdown, disturbance or other incident during pre-election preparation, at early voting sites, at the polls or at central count facility, and after the election.

Include -

- Evacuation of polls and central count locations. Assign specified meeting places and account for personnel and the public. People first.
- Emergency phone numbers. 911, county election officials, first responders.
- Communication or technology failures for phones, machines, networks and the internet. Have contact numbers of technicians and vendors.
- Staffing issues include illness and transportation. Backup staffing.

**Suggested Emergency Procedures
To Protect the Public and Preserve the Integrity of Elections
for Polling Places and Central Count Facilities**

- Supply shortages and delivery options.
- Relocating polling places or backup central count locations or options.

Train and Cross Train Staff and Election Workers -

Instruct all workers to stay calm and use common sense. Think “People First.” Provide easy to read handouts.

- Call 911 in case of emergency. Call the election number and report a situation. Make sure election workers have county election phone numbers and cell phone numbers in poll worker materials. Have poll worker cell phone numbers available at the county.
- Prepare an emergency evacuation plan and procedures for each polling site or the central count facility. Evacuate calmly. Use common sense. Have a meeting place. Make sure all people have been accounted for.
- Instruct the chief judge to assign poll workers in advance to specific physical areas at the polls and specific responsibilities, i.e. check voting booths, restrooms, other offices, and account for every person.
- Central count locations should also assign specific locations and responsibilities to staff in the event of an evacuation. Evacuate calmly. Use common sense. Have a meeting place. Make sure all people have been accounted for.
- In the event of a power outage or darkness, escort people out of the polling place or county offices safely using the flashlight app in cell phones.
- If safe to do so, remove ballots and materials to a secure location like the locked trunk of a car. Use 2 person security procedures. Assign specific responsibilities in advance, i.e. retrieve blank ballots, poll books, ballots from voters in poll booths.
- If a voter is in the process of voting, spoil their ballot and instruct them that they will be issued a new ballot when it is safe to continue voting.
- Central count locations remove backup election definition files, if safe to do so, so that ballots could possibly be tabulated at another county.
- Design an incident report form to report accidents or injuries for later review. Include in poll worker materials.

Communicate with county staff, your election staff and temporary personnel. It is important to develop an emergency plan that suits your county.

Coordinate your county’s response with your Sheriff, fire, road and bridge, power company, phone and internet providers and your county emergency planner and State agencies. Have contact information readily available.

Also see the Election Assistance Commission brochure [“6 tips for Contingency and Disaster Planning”](#) for additional links and suggestions.