

Emergency/Disaster Planning Regarding Weather and Natural Disasters at Polling Locations

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Introduction

For my capstone project I am focusing on Emergency/Disaster planning regarding Weather and Natural Disasters in our Polling Locations within Dubois County. Last May of the 2024 Primary Election we had a possible chance of Severe Weather during the late morning hours. When we learned there being a possibility of pop-up storms, we started asking ourselves what our plan is if there is a Tornado or a Power Outage at a Polling Location. We then realized we need an Emergency Action Plan for these types of situations. At that time Dubois County didn't have a contingency plan in place for these types of situations. This caused safety concerns for our Poll Workers and the citizens at the Polling Locations. Emergencies and Disasters can happen anywhere at any time, with or without warning, which is why I have decided to start putting together a basis plan in case one of these situations would arise.

Project Goals

My main goal for this project is to help create a base line plan that our County can use in an Emergency on Election Day. My hope is that if I can create a plan for these two situations, we are then able to build on our plan from there to create an Action Plan for diverse types of Emergencies that could arise at a Polling Location. Another goal in creating this project is to hopefully help our Poll Workers feel more at ease when working at a Polling Location during dangerous weather. It is my overall goal to create a plan that can help keep everyone safe and secure in any type of situation that our County could face on Election Day.

Methods

During our previous Presidential Election, our Emergency Management Agency helped create an Emergency Action Plan for each polling location. I created two separate fliers that I

had the Clerks post at the entrance table at each Polling Location that had bullet-point steps of what to do during an Emergency (attached with paper). The Dubois County Emergency Management Agency had created a simple Action Plan for each of our Inspectors to keep on hand that we had briefly gone over with them regarding each type of situation and what action they needed to take. I had learned a lot about preparing fliers regarding simple step by steps for Emergencies from a Table Top Exercise with CISA (Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency). We also incorporated inviting one of our SRO (Special Resource Officer: a sworn officer assigned to schools for safety) officers along with the Emergency Management team to come out and talk to our Poll Workers. Our SRO officer, Tim Lambert, prepared a “ALICE” presentation for our Poll Workers. “ALICE” is an active shooter training that we have incorporated in our courthouse this past year that we really thought was beneficial for each of our polling locations as well. “ALICE” stands for ALERT, LOCKDOWN, INFORM, COUNTER, and EVACUATE. ALERT is the first form of notice you have that there is danger in the area. LOCKDOWN is the second thing you think to do. INFORM is the third step, if you’re in a safe location to do so, you follow to communicate with law enforcement on your location or the intruder’s location if possible. COUNTER is the alternative and/or next step to use, where you would try to distract the intruder from being able to cause harm to you or anyone else. EVACUATE is the last step that you will follow, only if it is safe to do so. (Navigate360, 2025). Our biggest goal we have achieved so far is keeping our Poll Workers safe, secure, and most importantly comfortable in any situation that may arise. I don’t believe this type of project will ever be a problem that can be solved, due to the evolving world we live in and the new threats that arise every day.

CEATS Principles and Tools

I have utilized a few resources from Session 5, Election Integrity including EAC: Election Security, EAC – Voting System Security Measures Guide, DHS: Election Security, and Election Center – Elections Security Checklist. The biggest resource I have found the most successful from is the Elections Security Checklist, which provides questions about Physical Security Risks and Physical Defenses. When I had gone through some of these risks, I realized that we as a County do not have any action plan prepared for Weather related issues. Realizing that most of the “Security” topics that are discussed are regarding network, or tampering with equipment, but rarely was I able to find concrete documentation discussing Emergency Planning regarding Weather, Power Outages, as well as Safety concerns with a Voter or Citizen coming into the Polling location with a weapon or becoming aggressive towards Poll Workers.

Conclusion

I believe that adding an Action Plan to our County Elections will provide safer Polling Locations and provide Poll Workers with a sense of relief that they will always have a plan if something were to arise in a location. During our previous Election we had great results with positive environments and no complaints from our workers regarding feeling unsafe in a Polling Location. The hope of making this plan is that we will never have to use these steps, but they offer a sense of comfort to our voters as well as the workers. I believe the biggest impact this project had on myself is knowing that all the information I have learned and have now been able to put together will help me or someone else in any type of situation not just a Polling Location.

References

Navigate360. (2025). Retrieved from Alice Training: <https://www.alicetraining.com/our-program/alice-training/>

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