

Section 5: Assuring Security of and Troubleshooting Problems with Voting Technology

Poll workers and voting systems are crucial components of elections. The integrity of each California election depends on the reliability of the poll workers and the security of the millions of ballots, thousands of voting machines used to record and/or tabulate votes, and electronic poll books used in lieu of a paper roster. Therefore, one of the most important aspects of poll worker instruction is voting technology and system security.

To ensure the security of voting equipment used in a polling place or vote center, poll worker training should include the following topics.

Pre-Election Day Security

- If poll workers pick up ballots, voting equipment, or other sensitive materials prior to Election Day, training should include how to keep those materials secure. It should also ensure an accurate chain of custody is kept of all materials and equipment from the time they leave the county elections office until they are returned at the end of Election Day.

Set-Up

- Training should include clear descriptions of security mechanisms used to ensure materials and equipment are in proper condition. Training for poll workers responsible for operating voting equipment on Election Day should also include hands-on set-up of voting equipment, stressing the importance of using all required security measures for a given system.

Detecting Tampering

- Poll workers should be educated about how to recognize tampering and what to do if they discover voting equipment has been, or is being, tampered with or modified in any way. Poll workers should also be taught to inspect voting equipment and voting booths throughout the day to ensure nothing has been altered.

Machine Issues or Problems

- Training should include instructions with clear procedures for addressing common voting equipment issues or problems that a poll worker could easily remedy (e.g., identify an unplugged machine and replace a printer with a second printer in the event of a paper jam).
- For all other problems that cannot be easily remedied, poll workers should be taught to immediately call the county elections office for help. Each county elections official must establish procedures to maintain a log of all incidents and how they were resolved.

Distractions and Authorized Personnel

- Poll workers should be taught to not allow anyone, including election system vendors, to “troubleshoot” voting equipment without proper identification and clear authorization received directly from the county elections office. Poll workers should also be taught to not allow anyone to linger near the poll workers or polling booths, or to prevent the poll workers from being able to continually watch the voting area.

Closing a Voting System or Component

- Training should include hands-on instruction demonstrating the closing of all voting equipment, including how poll workers must secure and account for all ballots, paper record copies, and/or electronically recorded votes. This also includes following procedures for transmitting electronic poll book data back to the county elections office. Poll workers must complete various forms to ensure all items are accounted for, and training must include a review of these forms and their requirements. The chain-of-custody rules must be reinforced at this time.

Safely Transporting Voting Equipment and Ballots

- Poll workers must know the rules for returning to the county elections office all voted and unvoted ballots and other voting equipment and materials. At least two poll workers must accompany the ballots at all times, and a clearly documented chain of custody must be maintained for all ballots and electronic equipment relating to vote totals and ballots cast. (§§ 14422(a)(2), 14434, 15202)

Other Issues

- If anything unusual happens with a voting machine or system, poll workers should immediately log the problem and call the county elections office. Poll workers should be trained to understand that one of their primary jobs is to watch and bear witness to the electoral process. Therefore, if poll workers question something, they should record it and obtain official direction on how to proceed.

Artificial Intelligence Capabilities and Considerations

- Artificial intelligence technology has created new challenges for poll workers to consider. Bad actors can fake audio, video, or writing to mimic the voice, likeness, or writing style of public elections officials. This requires that poll workers take time to verify instructions that are not provided in person. Poll workers should call the county elections office to verify instructions that are out of the ordinary.