

Issue Guide for Navigating a Potential Bomb Threat

Overview

The following best-practices are for election offices who may find themselves facing questionable bomb threats and who must work with law enforcement to immediately verify that the voting location is safe, without hindering participation of voters in line at the polling place. The most important practice is to call law enforcement immediately. Please refer to the [What To Do: Bomb Threats](#) Publication from the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA).

Best Practices and Suggested Steps

1. Immediate Action – Notification and Coordination with Law Enforcement

- **Call law enforcement immediately:** Notify local law enforcement as soon as a threat is identified. This step is critical for safety and allows for swift, expert verification of the threat.
- **Share all details:** Relay specifics of the threat (e.g., timing, language used) to aid assessment.
- **Establish a single point of contact:** Assign a lead election official to communicate with law enforcement.
 - If you have a direct law enforcement contact for election work (such as an election response team), contact them.
 - Otherwise use your best, most immediate law enforcement contact.

2. Site Assessment and Verification

- **Quick, efficient threat assessment:** Work with law enforcement to conduct an unobtrusive, swift sweep of the area to verify safety without alarming voters or staff.
- **Work together to evaluate the threat:**
 - Is it from a verifiable source?
 - Is it coming from multiple sources?
 - Is it part of a pattern in your jurisdiction?
- **Safe distance for voters and staff:** If necessary, guide voters and staff to a safe perimeter without disclosing threat specifics, maintaining calm and control at the site.

3. Continuity of Voting Operations

- **Minimize disruption:** Coordinate with law enforcement to determine if polling can safely continue, particularly if voters are waiting in line. Prioritize clear communication with voters to keep them informed without inciting panic.
 - As law enforcement arrives, they will ask to close the polling location to review for potential threats. Proactively assist them by moving staff, observers, and voters out of the building.
 - However, do not close the site. Inform all voters present that the polling will continue as soon as possible.
 - Plan for voters to vote provisionally if possible.
- **Close polling location only if directly instructed by law enforcement.**
- **Remote voting options:** If feasible, consider relocating voting equipment and staff to a safe, nearby location where voting can continue uninterrupted.
- **While waiting for law enforcement to perform its sweep, keep voters in line outside the building.**
 - Consider drafting a short roster (sign-in sheet) to track voters' place in line.
 - Wait to instruct voters to leave until there is a definitive plan to vote elsewhere.
 - Contact local parties and voting rights organizations to communicate that the polling location will remain open if possible. Direct communication stops disinformation.
 - Make sure the people who received the threat are available to speak to authorities or at least give their contact information.

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Best Practices and Suggested Steps

4. Communication and Transparency

- **Inform poll workers:** Brief poll workers on the situation, so they're equipped to calmly address voter concerns.
- **Voter assurance messaging:** Provide clear, calming information to voters in line, emphasizing that their safety is top priority, while affirming efforts to continue voting operations.

5. Interagency Collaboration

- **Contact your county or municipal attorney.**
 - Consider filing an emergency request with local courts to extend the hours of your polling building, pending the length of the sweep.
- **Contact your local district attorney / prosecutor's attorney so they can investigate.**
 - Ask them to coordinate with federal and state authorities if/as needed.

6. Post-Incident Debrief and Documentation

- **Debrief with law enforcement:** After the threat is cleared, conduct a debrief to understand response effectiveness and identify any improvements.
- **Document actions taken:** Record details of the incident, including timelines, communications, and law enforcement responses, for future reference and to inform safety protocols.

Suggested Holding Statements and Sample Responses

As an election official, communicating with voters, media, and other community stakeholders is important. This generic, nonpartisan document provides sample statements to help guide your discussions with key audiences.

RESPONDING TO VOTING LOCATION THREATS

We are grateful for the swift response from law enforcement today to ensure that a **[INSERT NATURE OF THREAT: e.g. bomb, fire, shooting, etc]** threat against **[INSERT NAME OF LOCATION AND LOCATION: e.g. precinct 10 at Anytown Elementary School]** did not prevent voters from exercising their right to cast a ballot and have their voice be heard. When the threat was received **[INSERT WHO RECEIVED THE THREAT]**, we immediately **[INSERT ACTION AND RESPONSE TAKEN]**. While the authorities investigate, we remain vigilant for other attempts to disrupt our smooth operations on Election Day here in **[INSERT NAME OF JURISDICTION]**. **[INSERT IF APPLICABLE: Voters in line at a precinct where a disruption occurs can vote at any other precinct in [INSERT NAME OF JURISDICTION] or will be given alternative voting location instructions by an election official on-site.**

RESPONDING TO ATTEMPTED FOREIGN ELECTION INTERFERENCE

Attempted foreign interference in our elections is meant to divide Americans, sow chaos, and undermine our democracy. Election officials and law enforcement have quickly detected it and called it out.

- Example: Georgia SOS Brad Raffensperger alerted voters to a video spreading lies about voter eligibility. "As Americans we can't let our enemies use lies to divide us and undermine our faith in our institutions—or each other." Similar threats in other states were attributed to Russian email domains.
- Example: The FBI alerted voters that Election Day bomb threats, none of them credible, appeared to originate from Russian email domains.

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Suggested Holding Statements and Sample Responses

Election officials at every level, law enforcement leaders, and cybersecurity officials are working together to keep this election safe and secure.

- Today, we saw a string of non-credible bomb threats spread by foreign actors in key counties across the country.
- Where threats were made, election officials, law enforcement, and pro-democracy allies worked together to ensure that every eligible voter can safely cast their ballot. There was minimal disruption, and voting resumed quickly. The threats turned out to be fake.
- The important thing for voters to know is that it is safe to vote. And election officials and law enforcement will work together to keep the vote counting process safe and secure.
- Officials are staffed and prepared to identify and address threats and efforts to disrupt elections, including attempted foreign interference. They have been preparing all year.

Lies and rumors about our elections, including from foreign sources, can spread quickly during election season. State and local election officials are the best source for accurate information about elections.

- Refer only to trusted sites managed by state and local officials for sources of information.

The bottom line is: U.S. elections have never been more secure.

- Suggested uplift: CISA Director Jen Easterly has said there's no way foreign actors can directly alter the outcome of our elections.