



★ VIRGINIA ★
DEPARTMENT *of* ELECTIONS

GREB Handbook

Chapter 15

Emergency Procedures

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15. Emergency Procedures

Even the best laid plans can often change upon a moment's notice. Emergencies happen and localities need to be prepared to handle them. This chapter contains checklists that localities may use in the preparation for and in the event of emergencies. The outcome of an emergency is often decided before it ever happens: it is determined during the preparation and training before election day. The best plans are of no use if they are not properly communicated to the people who need them the most. Therefore, localities must ensure that their officers of election are trained in how to handle certain emergencies.

In addition to this Chapter, please consider emergency preparedness resources your locality may provide and the resources available through Virginia's Department of Emergency Management.¹

15.1 ASSESSMENT FOR THE POLLING PLACE

As part of their normal preparation before election day, the electoral board should conduct an assessment for each polling place:

- Locate fire extinguishers/fire alarms and inform all election officials of their location.
- Identify emergency escape routes/exits.
- Identify a predetermined assembly point to be used in the case of evacuation at least 300 feet away from the building and outside of parking areas, if possible.
- Familiarize all officials with the Incident Report Form.
- Identify potential hazard areas (icy steps/sidewalks, slick/wet floors) and notify custodial or management staff of the polling place to correct the hazards, if possible.
- Identify dialing procedures for contacting 9-1-1 (Determine whether an outside line requires dialing additional digits such as "9" resulting in 9-9-1-1).
- Provide emergency supplies to every polling place (flashlight, list of important phone numbers, a copy of locality's emergency plan, etc.).
- Ensure that every polling place has access to a phone in case of an emergency. General registrars should keep a listing of emergency contact numbers.

¹ To access these emergency management resources, please visit the [Department of Emergency Management website](#).



15.2 ELECTION DAY EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

The following sections provide checklists that can be used by elections officials in emergency circumstances.

15.2.1 Emergency Polling Place Relocation

If an election day emergency requires the polling place be moved to an alternate location take the following steps:

- The precinct chief election officer should contact the general registrar/electoral board office which will in turn contact local law enforcement and/or local emergency management services.
- After contact with local law enforcement and/or local emergency management services, the general registrar/electoral board should contact the Commissioner of the Department of Elections and be prepared to propose an alternate location and proposed method of handling the continuation of the election. Use the Emergency Polling Place Relocation form (ELECT-310) located in the SharePoint [Forms Warehouse](#) Category *Emergency Procedures* for this purpose.
- Meanwhile, polling place officials should be following the election day Emergency Procedures provided, and if the polling site should be evacuated all present persons should assemble at a predetermined assembly point at least 300 feet away from the building (or as close to 300 feet as terrain/conditions will allow) and outside of parking areas, if possible.
- An alternate location must be established within the precinct or within 1 mile outside the precinct boundary. Arrangements should be made to transport the necessary equipment & supplies to the new location. The safest, most efficient shelter should be used to resume voting as soon as possible after the Department of Elections Commissioner has approved the new location.
- Voters and all candidates on the ballot (or their campaigns) must be notified by the most efficient means, such as fliers and the news media (television and radio, if possible), of the new polling location. Notices must also be posted at and outside the old (original) polling place, if possible.

15.2.2 Emergency Evacuations

- Get as accurate a headcount as possible and use this headcount to make sure everyone is evacuated from the polling place.



- Alert all present individuals of the emergency circumstances as calmly as appropriate and remind them of the predetermined assembly area.
- Voting machine officer should take quick note of the “Public Counter” number on the machine(s).
- A designated officer should notify the office of the general registrar/electoral board ASAP.
- The chief officer should account for all election officials and evacuated voters.
- The chief officer should designate an officer to list the names of those who checked in before the evacuation, but were unable to vote.
- If time permits, polling place officials should try to take with them the following:
 - Counter and ballot container(s)
 - Precinct Pollbook(s), paper or electronic
 - Public Counter number recorded from each machine
 - Unused ballots
 - Paper Ballots
 - Unused provisional ballot envelopes
 - Paper
 - Pens
 - Necessary forms & materials to allow voting to continue (such as Affirmation of Eligibility, provisional voting materials and any precinct lookup devices/lists)
 - Voting equipment (if feasible)
 - Personal belongings

Officers should advise voters that they may either wait until the building can be re-entered or (if officers have the materials to allow them to do so) vote on an official paper ballot, optical scan ballot, or battery operated voting equipment. Follow the procedures for use of emergency paper ballots if the equipment is not available or cannot be used.²

- Any voter who chooses to leave because of the emergency and later returns must be allowed to go to the head of any line of persons waiting to vote. Officers should make a list for this purpose. However, a voter who has already been checked in on the pollbook as present to vote and then leaves may not return and vote later.

² See § 24.2-642.



- At no time may the line of those who have checked in and not yet voted extend beyond the observation of the officers, or extend outside of the polling place.³ However, public safety must take priority in an emergency. As such, one officer should stay with the evacuated voters who have been checked in but not yet voted. Voting should recommence (either inside the polling place or at the alternate location) as soon as it is both possible and safe.
- Attempt to resume the election at the predetermined assembly point if circumstances permit.
- The electoral board, with the Department of Elections' approval, may authorize moving the polling to another location if there will be a prolonged or permanent evacuation.⁴
- In the event relocation is authorized, an election official must leave directions to the new location posted on the doors (post on both regular and handicapped accessible entryways). The directions should indicate the time this polling place was vacated and on whose authority, e.g., Vacated by authority of the electoral board, 2 p.m. To vote, please report to _____.

15.2.3 Fire

- If the fire is very small and contained, attempt to extinguish with a fire extinguisher and then call 9-1-1.
- If the fire cannot be extinguished, evacuate everyone using the predetermined emergency routes to the predetermined assembly point.
- If evacuation is necessary, follow the above procedures for emergency evacuations.

15.2.4 Bomb Threat or Suspicious Package

If the threat is imminent, evacuate everyone from the polling place using the predetermined emergency procedures contained in this document.

Call 9-1-1 and report everything about the threat exactly as the caller made it to you.

Notify the general registrar's office as soon as possible after calling 9-1-1.

The person who received the threat call should document or record the conversation details while it is fresh in their mind.

³ See [§ 24.2-643\(B\)](#).

⁴ See [EMERGENCY POLLING PLACE RELOCATION](#).



If a bomb threat is phoned into a polling place, get as much information from the caller as possible. If possible, have another person listen to the conversation. Do not be afraid to ask questions.⁵

If a suspicious package appears, such as an abandoned backpack or brief case, contact local law enforcement or emergency management for instructions; they will determine whether the package poses any danger and can pursue an appropriate course of action. Consider signage that abandoned items will be turned over to local law enforcement. Work with local law enforcement and emergency management to develop appropriate security protocols for polling places.⁶

15.2.5 Power Outage

- Contact the general registrar or electoral board office. The staff will attempt to get power restored or auxiliary power provided, or supply additional paper ballots if they will be needed.
- If possible, contact the custodial or management staff of the polling place.
- Most equipment should remain operational. If a tabulating device becomes inoperable, instruct the voter to deposit his ballot into the emergency ballot slot on the ballot container. Instructions are provided in the election day Guide under Voting Machine Position. Notify the registrar if it is necessary to use the emergency ballot slot.
- Attempt to find an alternate source of light until power is restored.
- Meanwhile, use the flashlight, if provided with the election supplies.
- If it is feasible, the polling location may temporarily be moved to another area of the building where natural light is available or car headlight beams can be directed into the area.
- If necessary, continue voting using official paper ballots:
 - Be sure to accurately reflect these voters as paper ballot voters in the pollbook.
 - Call the registrar's office to request additional paper ballots if necessary. Consider using blank ballots set aside for provisional voting.

⁵ [The Virginia Capitol Police Emergency Planning Manual \(2009\) on pdf page 32](#) provides a list of suggested questions to ask in this or similar situations.

⁶ See [§ 24.2-310\(B\)](#) (accessibility and usability of each polling place).



- If it appears more ballots will not arrive before the existing supply has been depleted, procedures for making additional emergency paper ballots are available pending the approval of the electoral board.⁷
- If power cannot be restored
 - The electoral board, with the Department of Elections' approval, may authorize moving the polling to another location.⁸
 - An election official must leave directions to the new location posted on the doors (post on both regular and handicapped accessible entryways). The directions should indicate the time this polling place was vacated and on whose authority, e.g., Vacated by authority of the Electoral Board 2 p.m. To vote, please report to _____.

If the power goes out during the ascertainment of the results, representatives of both political parties must be present with the materials at all times before the officers of election may move the voting materials to an alternate location.

15.2.6 Inclement or Precarious Weather Conditions

The staff of the electoral board and registrar should monitor reports of extreme weather conditions prior to elections. In the case that extreme weather is predicted *before* the election take the following steps:

- Arrangements must be made with the managers of the facilities where polling places are located that they must have the facility open for polling, delivery, and pick-up of the voting equipment
- The voting machine technicians should deliver the equipment to the polling locations ahead of schedule.

In the event that a report of dangerous conditions is received from a credible source (School Superintendent, Sheriff's Office, fire and emergency management officials) or an emergency weather channel *while* the election is being held, follow appropriate precautions:

- In the event of an **earthquake**, evacuate the building using the procedures outlined in this document and assemble at the predetermined evacuation assembly point if possible.
- In the event of a **tornado**, calmly assemble voters and election officials in an internal space away from windows, preferably in an enclosed hallway.

⁷ See [§ 24.2-642](#) (discussing the procedures for creating emergency ballots).

⁸ See [EMERGENCY POLLING PLACE RELOCATION](#).



- In the event of **icy/snowy/treacherous walkways**, assign an election official or an election page to keep entrances and exits free of ice and snow, as well as, posting multiple signs boldly indicating “caution” areas (wet floors, icy walkways, etc.). Keep the registrar apprised of present and changing conditions, as well as the steps taken to improve those conditions.

The Governor has the authority to postpone elections other than general elections for federal office in the event of a State of Emergency declared by the Governor, or declared by the President or the Governor of another state and confirmed by the Governor.⁹ The election may be postponed up to 14 days from the original election date. If a local governing body in the affected area determines that a longer postponement is required, it may petition the Virginia Supreme Court for an extension, not to exceed 30 days from the original election date.¹⁰

In certain types of declared State of Emergencies and public emergencies, the Commissioner of the Department of Elections has authority to designate alternative methods and procedures to handle absentee ballot applications and ballots.¹¹

15.2.7 Illness, Injury, or Death

In the event of a serious illness, injury or death, the following steps should be taken:

- Have an election official call emergency service at 9-1-1.
- Make sure that the election official identifies himself, gives the full address of the polling place and the name of the building, and is prepared to provide directions to the polling place and the information about the extent of the person's injury.
- Unless trained to provide emergency medical services, do not administer treatment or provide medications (either over the counter or otherwise) to the individual.
- Complete an Incident Report Form.
- An officer may tell the person you are filing an Incident Report with the electoral board.
- Express care and concern without admitting guilt or wrongdoing, or providing medical or other advice on the proper course of treatment. You may assist the individual in getting medical care by calling 9-1-1.

⁹ See [§ 24.2-603.1](#).

¹⁰ [§ 24.2-603.1](#) (setting forth the procedures for postponing an election).

¹¹ [§ 24.2-713](#) (when the Commissioner of the Department of Elections may designate alternative methods).



- In the event of a serious illness, injury, or death, call the registrar/electoral board office after completing the call to 9-1-1.

15.2.8 Inability to Enter the Polling Location

In the case of high water before or after the polls open:

- First notify the registrar, who will in turn contact the local electoral board.
- The electoral board must follow the guidelines established in your Election Emergency Procedures.
- After the alternate plans have been finalized, the electoral board and chief election official will notify election officials on how to proceed.

In the case of locked doors:

- If the chief election official will not have the key for the polls, he should ensure, prior to election day, that he has phone numbers for contacting a facility custodian or the management staff.
- If the chief election official cannot make contact facility staff, he should contact the registrar and begin following the guidelines for an alternate polling location in the Election Emergency Plans.
- The Code of Virginia states that polls **MUST** be open for voters to place their vote at 6:00 a.m.¹² Officers of election **MUST** be present by 5:15 a.m.¹³ Officers other than the chief and assistant may be assigned to work less than a full election day.¹⁴

15.2.9 Emergencies Involving Election Officials and Supplies

If the chief election official does not arrive with the supplies by 5:15 a.m.:

- Any election official present should notify the registrar
- The office staff will attempt to reach the chief at his home.
- If the chief cannot immediately get to the polls with the supplies and books, the electoral board will deliver supplies, ballots, and a machine key immediately to the polling place.

¹² [§ 24.2-603](#) (polls must be open by 6:00 a.m.).

¹³ [§ 24.2-639](#) (officers of election must be present by 5:15 a.m.).

¹⁴ [§ 24.2-115.1](#) (officers other than the chief and assistant may work less than a full day).



- Until the pollbooks (which are in the custody of the chief) arrive, the registrar's office must be called to verify that each voter is qualified. For each qualified voter who votes on the registrar's authorization before the pollbooks arrive, record the voter's full name, street address and pollbook count (PBC) number on a note pad.
- Once the officers have the pollbooks, they record the voters and PBC numbers in the appropriate sections (double-checking names and addresses to make sure the correct voter is marked).
- **If there is no phone service, or the registrar is not available, follow the normal procedures for a voter who is not listed on the pollbook, using a paper ballot and completing the Provisional Ballot envelope. Do not mark these voters on the notepad or pollbook.**

If a voter must leave before you receive ballots, take his/her name and phone number. If the voter returns later in the day, place him/her at the front of the line, if one exists. However, a voter who has already been checked in on the pollbook as present to vote and then leaves may not return and vote later.

If the chief election official is ill or has a family emergency before the election:

- The assistant chief or other designated official will be notified to pick up the supplies and ballots.
- That individual will serve as chief in absence of the originally designated chief.

If the supplies are destroyed, immediately call the registrar so that new supplies may be furnished.

- The supplies and ballots must not to be left overnight in an automobile. The chief should ensure the supplies, equipment, and ballots are safely secured both at home and at the polling location when they go to check their equipment. If the supplies are destroyed, the registrar's staff will then replace supplies.

In the event that the precinct is short of election officials

- The shortage must be reported as the chief or assistant chief becomes aware.
- The registrar's office will attempt to replace the official.
- The other election officials must proceed in opening the polls.
- If an officer of election is absent or unable to serve and the polls have been open for one hour, the remaining officers of election shall appoint a substitute officer of election for the precinct. The substitute officer shall possess the



same qualifications and, after taking the requisite oath, have the same powers as officers appointed by an electoral board.¹⁵

15.3 OTHER DIFFICULTIES ON ELECTION DAY

In the event that voting equipment malfunctions or is damaged:

- Immediately report to the voting machine technicians or the registrar/electoral board's office.
- Follow procedures in the Code under "Inoperative Equipment."
- If using optical scan ballots, voting will continue normally except for the tabulating.
 - Any voted ballots must be placed in the emergency ballot container. The ballots will remain in that container until the polls close and then the ballots will be fed through the counter.
 - If the officials neglect to place the ballots in the emergency ballot container before running the tapes, the technicians and an electoral board member must be summoned to the precinct and observe while all the ballots are run through the counter again before the results can be reported.
 - The ballots may have to be read or hand counted if the locality does not have the equipment.
- If using DREs, and other equipment is not available or usable, voting should continue using paper ballots, and emergency paper ballots authorized by the electoral board if necessary.¹⁶

In the event that the ballot container is damaged or missing

- Immediately report this to the registrar and a technician will be sent to repair or replace the container.
- If the emergency ballot slot cannot be used, the voters must place their ballots in the black supply container, or other container that is sealed and has a slot on top.
- The ballots must remain in that container until the polls close and then the ballots must be fed through the tabulator.

In the event that the precinct phone is not working

¹⁵ [§ 24.2-118.](#)

¹⁶ See [§ 24.2-642](#) (discussing what steps to take if voting equipment malfunctions or is damaged).



- Report the problem to the facility's custodial or the management staff.
- Another phone may be obtained to report the nonfunctional phone or down service to the registrar.
- If needed, a wireless phone may be provided until phone service is restored.¹⁷

In the event that the registrar's phones are not working

- Wireless phones may be used until service is restored.
- All precincts must be notified of the new temporary number at which the registrar's staff may be reached.

In the event of power failure at the registrar's office

- The registrar shall determine if the staff will be relocated.
- All election officials must be notified of the new location and contact information.

In the event the ballot box fills, officers of election may open the ballot container and empty the ballots with the following safeguards:

- The optical scan ballot container shall be opened in plain sight of any authorized party representatives or other observers and, once the ballots have been deposited into an auxiliary ballot container, both ballot containers shall remain in plain sight in the polling place.
- Any such auxiliary ballot container used shall have a lock and key and an opening of sufficient size to admit a single folded or unfolded ballot and no more.¹⁸
- At least two officers of election, representing both political parties, must transfer the ballots.¹⁹ Two members of one single party may transfer the ballots if the election taking place is a single-party primary.

15.4 IF A COURT EXTENDS POLLING HOURS

In any situation where the officers of election are notified that the polling hours have been extended by court order, any person who offers to vote after the normal closing time of 7 p.m. must vote a provisional ballot. This does not apply to voters who are in line at 7 p.m.²⁰

¹⁷ [§ 24.2-625.2](#) (prohibitions for wireless phone communication in poll use, refers to in voting machines).

¹⁸ [§ 24.2-623](#).

¹⁹ See [1 Va. Admin. Code 20-60-50](#); SBE Policy 2008-010.

²⁰ [§ 24.2-653\(C\)](#).



- If news of the extended hours did not come from the general registrar or electoral board or via delivery of an official copy of the order from the court, the chief or assistant chief officer should immediately attempt to verify the extension with the registrar or electoral board. If a copy of the order is delivered to the polling place, the chief or assistant chief should immediately inform the general registrar or electoral board of its receipt and contents.
- Estimate the number of extra paper or optical scan ballots and provisional ballot envelopes that will be needed during the extended polling hours (all voters during that time must vote provisional ballots), and ask the general registrar or electoral board to have them delivered to the polling place. If there is not enough time to have them delivered, proceed with the stock on hand and use the procedures for emergency paper ballots, only if approved by the electoral board.²¹ If additional provisional ballot envelopes are needed, an officer may photocopy both sides of a blank provisional ballot envelope to be attached to a plain envelope or securely wrapped and sealed around the outside of the folded paper or optical scan ballot (with the information normally on the envelope visible, but the ballot kept private) if no plain envelopes are available. Do not staple through any ballot. Provisional voting envelopes can also be printed from SharePoint [Forms Warehouse](#) or stored on a flash drive.
- All qualified voters who are in line when polls would normally close must vote in the usual manner.
- Any voter entering the line after the normal closing time, but before the extended closing time, must vote by provisional ballot. Keep a separate running count of the number of provisional ballots issued after the normal poll closing time. What one judge orders, a higher court may overturn, so the ballots and counts must be kept completely separate. These voters may also be voting a provisional ballot for any of the usual reasons such as lack of ID and all applicable reasons should be marked. These voters will not be marked with a pollbook count number to indicate that they have voted but will be listed in the same manner as other provisional voters. These ballots will be counted and added to the results by the electoral board; they are not counted at the polls by the officers.²²
- After all voters in line by the extended poll closing time have voted, proceed to close the polls and report the results normally. If extra lines or comments must be added to the Statement of Results to separately account for the ballots

²¹ See [§ 24.2-642](#).

²² See Chapter 17 Provisional Ballots.



cast after the normal poll closing time, do so before the Statement is signed and the materials are sealed.

15.5 EMERGENCY REPRODUCTION OF BALLOTS

Instructions and Forms for Emergency Reproduction of Ballots. In 2008, the Department of Elections approved policies defining inoperable or unavailable equipment for the purposes of §§ [24.2-642](#) and [24.2-646.1](#), which allow for the use of paper ballots, and the reproduction of emergency paper ballots by the officers at the polls in certain emergency situations.²³

The forms, ELECT Policy 2008-004 “Inoperable Equipment” and 2008-011 “Unavailable Voting Equipment,” are available online.²⁴

The Department of Elections also granted permission to all localities which used optical scan ballots for any precinct (including absentee voting), to use the optical scan ballot or a copy of the optical scan ballot in lieu of the official paper ballot.²⁵

When distributing election materials to the polling locations, ensure each precinct is provided a master copy of form,²⁶ Authorization to Reproduce Ballots. Chief and assistant chief officers should be instructed on the purpose and use of this form in their training, which should also include examples of situations in which such reproduction might be needed. Emergency supplies should include copies of the form and instructions.

Before the election, the electoral board or general registrar for each polling place should determine if a copy machine is available for officer use, and how the officers can obtain access to it, especially before and after normal business hours. If there is no access to a copy machine at the polling location, the Chief should know where the nearest quick copy store is, and its hours.

Such copying capability might also be needed if the polling hours are extended by court order and the number of provisional ballot envelopes runs low and cannot be resupplied in time to continue voting without interruption.²⁷ If additional provisional ballot envelopes are needed, an officer may photocopy both sides of a blank provisional ballot envelope to be attached to a plain envelope or securely wrapped and sealed around the outside of the folded paper or optical scan ballot (with the information normally on the envelope visible, but the ballot kept private) if no plain envelopes are available. Do not staple through any ballot.

²³ See §§ [24.2-642](#), [24.2-646.1](#) (explaining when emergency equipment may be allowed).

²⁴ Both ELECT Policy Form [2008-004](#) Definition of Inoperable Equipment, and [2008-011](#) “Definition of Unavailable Equipment” are available online.

²⁵ See SBE Policy [2008-005](#), authorizing the Reproduction of Optical Scan Ballots.

²⁶ [ELECT-646.1](#).

²⁷ See § [24.2-653](#)(C) (explaining the circumstances in which a court may extend the polling hours).



