

PROTECT YOUR ELECTIONS

The Changing Face of Warehouse Security



In today's election environment, the task of protecting the voting infrastructure from cyber threats has taken center stage. Yet, managing risk begins long before the voter casts a ballot. For the elections official, securing the chain of custody for voting equipment begins where that equipment is stored – whether in a storage room, a warehouse or a large-scale technology center.

According to the election management guidelines published by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, jurisdictions need to assess their long-term storage for a wide range of risks, such as building fires, malfunctioning sprinkler systems, natural disasters, theft, terrorism, and power failures that may affect alarms and other security systems. The guidelines state, "Everything from building security, access control, and configuration management of the voting system equipment is an important component of the overall election security."¹

While there are many aspects to running a smooth and efficient warehouse operation, in this white paper, we'll focus on physical security risks. Specifically, we'll highlight four key elements for fortifying your long-term storage against risk:

- Monitoring events and patterns
- Controlling access
- Managing inventory and assets
- Planning for continuity of operations

¹ U.S. Election Assistance Commission. *Election Management Guidelines, Chapter 3, Physical Security*. Retrieved from <https://www.eac.gov/assets/1/6/260.pdf>.

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MONITORING EVENTS AND PATTERNS

The best security event is one that doesn't happen. **By monitoring events and patterns as they unfold, you can minimize risk, proactively address problems, and preempt incidents before they occur.**

From the largest jurisdictions to the smallest, election officials can take big steps to address security vulnerabilities:

- Invest in high-quality locks, steel doors, window bars, and security gates, and keep all doors locked when not actively in use.
- Install monitored alarm systems for fire, water, and unauthorized entry.
- Install video surveillance and check regularly to ensure that cameras are operational, actually recording useful images both outside and inside, and that images are stored for an appropriate period of time.
- Inspect your facility regularly for weak spots including doors, walls, and loading docks.
- Plan for regular upgrades to your systems and equipment to keep them current, and choose a system appropriate to your scale of operations. A system that is too complicated is often not used, and may introduce – rather than reduce – risk.

Each unique warehouse configuration presents both challenges and opportunities. "We have one large warehouse and it is divided into two sections," says Sandy Salazar, warehouse manager for Texas's Lubbock County, "If the fire alarm sounds, garage doors slam down between the two halves. After learning about the disastrous fire in Harris County, we began storing complete voting systems on each side of the garage doors. If something goes wrong on one side of the building, we still have some of the equipment we need for an election on the other side."

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“Our warehouse is closed to the public, and we monitor everyone entering and exiting the facility. There is key card access only – on the gate and every door. And we have cameras everywhere, even a video doorbell so that no one who doesn’t belong gets into the warehouse.”

– Bryan Schouten,
Harris County, Texas
Election Technology
Center Director

CONTROLLING ACCESS

What goes on inside your facility may be even more important than securing the outside. Only a select few employees should have keys to your warehouse points of access or to the alarms. Visitors, vendors, delivery drivers, and maintenance personnel should be logged in and out by an authorized employee, and never left unattended with your voting equipment, ballot stock, or stored memory cards.²

Lubbock County’s Salazar notes that access should be locked down based on the sensitivity of each asset. “Controllers and key devices are kept in a separate room within the secured warehouse, with only myself, the Election Administrator and the Chief Deputy having access. Once voting starts, even my access goes away.”

A jurisdiction that takes access protections seriously is positioned to avoid potential risk:

- Use unique badges to track access in and out of your facility.
- Keep your list of authorized personnel current. All authorized persons should undergo a background check and have a signed security agreement on file.
- Vigilant employees are your best security. Train your people regularly on your policies for physical access and intrusion response, keep them involved in security inspections, and ask them to speak up about possible risks.
- Change keys and entry codes for each election. Each election cycle is a good opportunity to audit and update your practices.

MANAGING INVENTORY AND ASSETS

Simply put, the chain of custody is the unbroken path that your election assets take from the moment they arrive from the vendor until the day they are decommissioned.

² The Election Center, 2016. *Election Security Checklist*. Retrieved from <https://www.electioncenter.org/national-association-of-election-officials/election-security-infrastructure/Election-Center-Checklist-Elections-Security-Checklist-Released-2017-05-22.pdf>.

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“I keep a detailed spreadsheet that tracks all inventory by serial number. From the controllers to the touch screens to flags, cones and surge protectors – if it goes out, it comes back in.”

– Sandy Salazar,
Lubbock County,
Texas

Election assets include not only your voting equipment, ballots, and memory cards, but also your printouts and logs, electronic storage media, and election administration documents.³

An effective asset management and inventory control process includes procedures such as:

- Document all serial numbers and equipment quantities in the storage facility.
- Create a system by which only authorized personnel can log assets in and out for elections or repair. Consider implementing barcode tracking to improve efficiency and accuracy, particularly for large jurisdictions with hundreds of assets.
- Inspect the tamper-proof seals each time an asset leaves or returns.
- Spot-check your processes on a regular basis.
- Use and monitor chain-of-custody logs for all equipment movement.
- Perform equipment hash value testing annually (at a minimum) to ensure that the software on the voting devices is working as expected.

“My vendor provides very specific details for my equipment. I have a receiving sheet for every piece,” said Gregg Long, Ada County, Idaho’s Elections Office warehouse manager. “This outlines a step-by-step procedure to check all equipment in after every election and before the next election. The vendor’s project manager helped us set up these procedures; these allow us to take care of our machines and our processes on our own. These detailed checklists ensure that my inventory is in good operating condition on Election Day.”

PLANNING FOR CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS

No matter how carefully you safeguard your assets, you can’t prevent all risk. In recent years, jurisdictions have been called upon to conduct elections in the face of unexpected events ranging from power outages to wildfires, hurricanes, volcanoes and terrorism. Such events have spurred a renewed focus on election-specific contingency planning.

³ National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL): July 2017, *NCSL’s The Canvass, Election Security: A Priority for Everyone*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/states-and-election-reform-the-canvass-july-2017.aspx>.

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“To help jurisdictions manage warehouse operations well, a vendor should be available whenever needed, help with issues we identify and keep all customers up-to-date if issues develop; then help work out solutions.”

– Bryan Schouten,
Harris County, Texas

Regarding long-term storage, a good contingency plan includes developing backup procedures, relationships, and resources that you can put into action when a disruption occurs.⁴ **In this arena, forging a high-trust, high-communication partnership with a knowledgeable and experienced election equipment vendor is a key piece of the puzzle.**

- Understand what disaster recovery services and support your vendor provides to mitigate disruption.
- When selecting a vendor, consider protection as well as price. Factor in the capacity of each vendor to respond to emergencies with expert help and replacement equipment so that your elections can be held even under trying circumstances.
- Discuss your contingency plans with your vendor each time you update the plan, and communicate your expectations clearly.

CONCLUSION

Election security is a moving target and will continue to change. In planning for secure and efficient warehouse storage, certain principles hold true. This includes taking out vulnerabilities where they start by monitoring your facility, controlling access, managing your inventory, and planning for continuity. By facing such challenges head-on, election officials across the country are keeping their sights on the main goal: maintaining the integrity and security of the electoral process.

Hart InterCivic wishes to acknowledge and thank our customers in Ada County, Idaho; Harris County, Texas and Lubbock County, Texas for contributing their expertise and best practices to this paper. Comments have been edited for context and brevity.

⁴ Ibid.

About Hart

Austin-based Hart InterCivic is a full-service election solutions innovator, partnering with state and local governments to deliver secure, accurate and reliable elections. The company's all-new Verity Voting system makes voting more straightforward, equitable and accessible – and makes managing elections more transparent, more efficient and easier. Only Hart offers a completely new, secure voting system that supports paper, electronic and hybrid voting.

15500 Wells Port Drive | Austin, TX 78728
www.hartintercivic.com | info@hartic.com | 800.223.HART