

Guidelines for Responding to Emergency Situations

Purpose

This procedure outlines the steps to follow during an emergency that occurs during a municipal election. Its purpose is to protect the integrity of the election and ensure the election is conducted in accordance with the principles of the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 (“the Act”).

Scope

This procedure applies to emergency situations that occur on Election Day at a polling location. All municipal election staff must follow these procedures.

The Election Assistant (EA) or Tabulating Clerk (TC) is responsible for ensuring these procedures are followed.

General

It is impossible to predict whether an emergency will occur or how it may affect the election process. This procedure provides guidance for specific emergency situations.

If an emergency occurs that is not covered in this procedure, the EA or TC must immediately contact the Returning Officer (Clerk) for instructions.

Declaration of an Emergency, Sec. 53, *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*

Under Section 53 of the Municipal Elections Act, 1996, the Clerk may declare an emergency if circumstances arise that could prevent the election from being conducted in accordance with the Act.

After declaring an emergency, the Clerk may make any arrangements considered necessary to conduct the election.

Any arrangements made by the Clerk must:

- Be made in good faith
- Follow the principles of the Act
- Take priority over any conflicting provisions in the Act or regulations

The emergency remains in effect until the Clerk declares that it has ended.

The Act also states that, if made in good faith, the Clerk’s declaration of emergency and related decisions cannot be overturned because they are considered unreasonable.

If voting is delayed for an extended period, the Returning Officer (Clerk) may:

- Extend voting hours at the polling location
- Delay the release of election results until voting is complete

Maintaining the Peace and Order

Section 11(2)(c), *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*

Section 11(2)(c) of the Act states that the Clerk is responsible for maintaining peace and order during the election.

The Clerk is responsible for determining whether additional assistance is needed and for arranging that assistance.

The Clerk may appoint individuals to help maintain peace and order. The Clerk may also authorize a Deputy Returning Officer (DRO), EA, or TC to request assistance when necessary.

A DRO may remove any person causing a disturbance at a voting location, including:

- Electors
- Scrutineers
- Candidates
- Media representatives
- Other members of the public

Hydro Outage

In the event of a power outage, the following procedures will apply:

1. The EA or TC must immediately contact the Returning Officer (Clerk) to report the outage.
2. The TC will continue processing ballots using the tabulator's backup power supply.
3. If the backup power supply stops working:
 - Ballots must be placed into the auxiliary compartment of the ballot box.
 - Each tabulator contains a battery that can operate for up to two hours during a power outage.
4. The Returning Officer (Town Clerk) will provide direction regarding:
 - Extended voting hours
 - Relocating or reopening the polling location

Fire/Flood

Election staff must know all emergency exits at the polling location.

The EA or TC must identify a central meeting area outside the building and communicate the location to all staff.

The following procedures apply if there is a fire, smoke, gas smell, flood, or fire alarm:

1. Remain calm.
2. The EA or TC must call 911 immediately.
3. The EA or TC must direct everyone to leave the building immediately, including:
 - Election staff
 - Electors
 - Candidates
 - Scrutineers
4. The DRO must leave with the Voters' List and ballots. If time allows and it is safe to do so, all loose documents and unused ballots should be placed into the supply box.
5. The TC must leave with the vote tabulator and ballot box. The TC must keep the tabulator in their possession at all times.
6. Everyone must evacuate using the nearest safe exit. Elevators must not be used.
7. The EA or TC must contact the Returning Officer (Clerk).
8. The EA or TC must confirm that everyone has safely evacuated the building by conducting a head count or roll call.
9. Re-entry into the building is only permitted after authorization from the Fire Chief or emergency personnel.
10. The Returning Officer (Town Clerk) will provide direction regarding:
 - Extended voting hours
 - Alternate polling locations

Medical Emergency

If a poll worker, elector, candidate, or scrutineer becomes ill or injured at a polling location, the EA or TC must:

1. Make the person as comfortable as possible.
2. Call 911 if emergency medical assistance is required.
3. Contact the Returning Officer immediately to discuss the situation and determine next steps, including replacing election staff if necessary.

If a poll worker becomes ill or injured but does not require an ambulance, the Returning Officer (Clerk) must still be contacted immediately. Replacement staff may be arranged if needed.

The ballots and vote tabulator must always remain secure. If the TC is affected by the emergency, responsibility for the tabulator and ballots transfers to the EA or another authorized election official.

Bomb Threat

If a bomb threat is received, the following procedures must be followed:

1. The EA or TC must ensure everyone remains calm.
2. The DRO must place all loose documents, including unused ballots, into the supply box.
3. The TC must leave the building with the vote tabulator and ballot box and keep the tabulator in their possession at all times.
4. Everyone must evacuate the building immediately using the nearest safe exit. Elevators must not be used.
5. The EA or TC must confirm that everyone has safely evacuated the building by conducting a head count or roll call.
6. The EA or TC must call 911.
7. The EA or TC must contact the Returning Officer (Town Clerk).
8. Re-entry into the building is only permitted after authorization from emergency authorities.
9. The Returning Officer (Town Clerk) will provide direction regarding:
 - Extended voting hours
 - Alternate polling locations

Election staff must not attempt to locate or investigate the suspected explosive device.

Staff should provide as much information as possible to emergency authorities, including:

- Details of the threat
- Description of the person making the threat, if available

Amendment to these Procedures and Rules

The Clerk may amend this document at any time to support voting operations, vote counting, tabulation, election security, or any other election-related matter.

The Clerk's interpretation of these procedures is final.

June 1, 2026