NUMBERED MEMO 2014-07

TO: County Boards of Elections
FROM: Kim Strach, Executive Director
RE: Emergency plans
DATE: April 28, 2014

The storms that rolled through last week gave us a new perspective on emergency backup plans. We are thankful that the damage was not worse than it was, and grateful that only one county, Pasquotank, lost power for an extended period of time at its office. Pasquotank was without power from 7:58 p.m. Friday evening through approximately 1:30 p.m. today. The office conducted one-stop voting without any power on Saturday and used a generator to conduct one-stop voting today until power was restored. While these conditions were not ideal, we are pleased that this county was able to maintain continuity of election services while ensuring the safety of their staff.

With the threat of more storms coming in this week, we want to make sure all counties are as prepared as possible. Please consider all of these precautions:

- **Be familiar with your emergency plans.** Every county’s one-stop plan included a confirmation that “the County Board of Elections has established procedures in the event of an emergency, power outage, etc.” Although that expectation relates to one-stop voting, CBE offices should have emergency backup procedures in place for all aspects of office operations, whether it is during one-stop, Election Day, canvass, or other times. Emergencies may not be weather-related, and may involve the sudden loss of key staff, for example.

- **In the event of a life-threatening emergency, please remember that the safety of your voters, election officials and county office staff should remain foremost in your mind.** If it is safe or reasonable to continue voting services, then please do so, but if conditions merit an evacuation, then you should evacuate. Please stay abreast of threatening weather conditions or other emergency situations and plan accordingly. Do not delay key decisions that will possibly place people in danger. You should also ensure that election officials and staff are aware of your office’s emergency plans and take the proper protocols, whenever possible, to secure voting equipment, ballots, and other election materials.
- Have cell phone numbers for all your Board Members, your county IT manager, and your County Manager, on paper and saved in your cell phone. Whenever possible, also get a backup phone number for each person you may need to reach in an emergency.

- Keep a current pollbook list on a portable drive such as a USB drive, update it often. You could potentially go to an area that has power and print it. On Election Day, it is standard procedure to keep a paper poll list for backup, but it is also important to have this available in case of emergencies during one-stop voting. It is not practical to print out multiple poll lists during the course of one-stop voting, but saving an electronic copy means you would have it available in case you need it.

- Have your laptops loaded with the complete SOSA installation and fully charged, even if you use them in connected mode only. If you are using an alternative power source, like a generator, make sure you are using a UPS to protect the laptop.

- Have blank copies of your ATV forms, one-stop applications, and Absentee Request forms printed out.

- Be familiar with power backups, including access to a backup power generator, backup battery life of voting machines and other equipment, etc. (If iVotronic machines are on battery backup, the printer may need to be reset after each voter.)

- If one location becomes unavailable due to damage or power outage, have arrangements with alternate location(s). Work with your county manager if necessary and consider moving electronic equipment (ex. server, voting equipment, printers, etc.) to higher ground in advance of a storm.

- Consider how an event such as a power outage might affect voters with disabilities. For example, automatic doors or elevators might not be working. Also consider lighting issues in the event of a power outage.

- Also, be familiar with your contacts for other types of emergency assistance, such as police department, fire department, utilities, etc. A state agency that may be a resource is the North Carolina Division of Public Safety, Emergency Management section. That office has created a free smartphone app, “ReadyNC” with real-time updates on weather and other conditions, and contact information for emergency departments. More information:
  https://www.ncdps.gov/Index2.cfm?a=000003,000010#

- For every location, key team members, such as the manager (or precinct judges, for polling places), should be familiar with the backup plan and other emergency protocols.

- Document the occurrence and resolution of any emergency by using incident reports available on the Elections Resource Center. This will allow other counties to better prepare for similar emergencies.

Thank you, and here’s hoping the weather settles down for us from here through the Primary.