Numbered Memo 2015-06

TO: County Boards of Elections
FROM: Kim Strach, Executive Director
RE: Emergency Preparedness
DATE: October 1, 2015

Today, Governor McCrory declared a state of emergency for all 100 counties with the impending arrival of Hurricane Joaquin in the coming days. As with any tropical storm, areas could experience power outages, flash flooding and other severe weather.

Currently, a portion of the state is conducting early voting, scheduled to end on Saturday, October 3 at 1:00 p.m., with municipal primaries and elections on Tuesday, October 6. Pursuant to G.S. § 163-27.1, as the chief State election official, my office may exercise emergency authority if it becomes necessary to respond to extremely inclement weather conditions.

It is critical that County Elections Directors contact the helpdesk immediately if a situation unfolds that may merit the exercise of emergency powers. County Election Directors should also stay in contact with your County Board members, local emergency officials, and media outlets.

To facilitate the flow of information, please immediately complete the online Emergency Contact Information Form. The State Board of elections subscribes to a robocall distribution service, and we may use your contact information to communicate as needed in an emergency. You should maintain updated phone numbers and email addresses for all one-stop elections officials and poll workers. State Board staff is happy to discuss the robocall service we use if you are considering a similar communications platform.

Every precaution should be taken to ensure the safety of election officials and voters,

- 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, it is necessary that you do so. If conditions merit an evacuation, however, 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 and contact the State Board of Elections immediately, if you believe changing conditions may warrant evacuation. 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.

- 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.

- 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. Share this information with key staff in your office and your Chief Judges. 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.

- 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.

- During one-stop voting, 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 and one-stop applications available.

- 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 a voting site cannot be used on Election Day, you may need to relocate voting activities either outside of the site (parking lot or an adjacent lot) or to an alternative location. Your voting site officials should be prepared in either event. Remember that any move should be facilitated with clear signage to direct voters where to go. At the minimum, you will need blank ballots, the poll list, and a secured ballot box. Further, if a voting site becomes unavailable due to damage or power outage, make arrangements for alternate location(s). Be prepared to temporarily transfer voters to another precinct or to the board of elections office on Election Day.

- 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. You should be prepared to post changes to voting sites on your website.

- 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.
• Maintain contacts for other types of emergency assistance, such as police department, fire department, utilities, etc. The NC Division of Public Safety maintains an Emergency Management section, which may be a resource to you. 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#

• 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.
  o Incident Report Form
  o Incident Report Form: Election Systems

• Make sure the SEIMS backup drives are taken off site. Make sure the SEIMS server is not on the floor, near windows and basically protected from rain or wind. If there is going to be an issue where the office is closing or going to lose power, contact the helpdesk. Our office can perform an emergency backup to the backup drives before they are taken offsite.

We will be closely monitoring weather conditions across the State and will be available to assist you as needed. Do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or concerns.