



# #PROTECT2024

## BALLOT DROP BOX SECURITY BEST PRACTICES FOR INCENDIARY DEVICES

### Introduction

OCTOBER 2024

In October 2024, there were three reported incidents of an incendiary device being attached to the outside of metal ballot drop boxes in two neighboring states. While current assessments indicate this is a localized threat, these events may spur other actors in other parts of the United States to commit similar criminal actions targeting ballot drop boxes. The following information is intended as best practice considerations for election officials in states where voting is already underway, and resource intensive adjustments to drop box locations are not feasible. These are intended as immediate-term considerations to specifically address the threat posed by incendiary devices being placed on, in, or near ballot drop boxes. For a more comprehensive guide on ballot drop box utilization and security, see the CISA Elections Infrastructure Government Coordinating Council and Sector Coordinating Council joint publication [Ballot Drop Box Resource Document](#).

***What is a Ballot Drop Box:** A secure, locked structure operated by election officials where voters may deliver their ballots from the time they receive them in the mail up to the time polls close on Election Day. Ballot drop boxes can be staffed or unstaffed, temporary, or permanent, and may be indoors or outdoors.*

### Best Practice Security Considerations for Immediate-Term Implementation to Mitigate Ballot Box Destruction or Tampering via Incendiary Devices

- **Increase Drop Box Ballot Pick-Up Frequency.** Consider increasing the frequency of ballot pick-ups between now and election day, including adding additional day and evening pickups to minimize the number of ballots left in drop boxes overnight.
- **Enhance lighting around drop box locations during low visibility periods.** If drop box locations are not well lit at night, explore temporary lighting solutions such as the portable lighting units used by Departments of Transportation, Departments of Public Works, or local construction companies.
- **Employ Video Surveillance.** Both outdoor and indoor drop boxes should have video surveillance security systems, when possible. Talk with business owners around existing drop boxes to identify existing video surveillance that may be available. For outdoor drop boxes where existing security cameras supporting host facilities are not available, consider low-cost portable solutions like outdoor recreational cameras commonly referred to as “trail” or “game” cameras.
- **Establish a Physical Security Presence.** As election day nears and the replacement ballot window closes, consider full time or after-hours security to monitor each drop box location. If there is insufficient election staff available, consider contract security services.
- **Request Law Enforcement Check-Ins.** Establish partnerships with local law enforcement and other first responders in the jurisdictions where drop boxes are located. Let them know where drop boxes are located and ask if first responders could incorporate check-ins at drop box locations as part of routine patrols.
- **Install Portable Fire Suppression Systems.** Some jurisdictions utilize after-market fire suppression solutions for inside ballot drop boxes.<sup>1</sup> These suppressant systems utilize non-liquid fire suppression substances, like

<sup>1</sup> “Open Mic Session—Ballot Drop Boxes,” Washington State Secretary of State Office, Pierce County Elections Office, and Lewis County Elections Office, July 5, 2017; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBRYsy9LlU>.

powders, to help extinguish or contain the spread of fires, which can prevent damage to ballots.<sup>2</sup> These commercially available tools are relatively low-cost (typical price range is less than \$100 per system) and can be installed using magnets inside metal drop boxes with typical utilization periods of up to five years before expiring. It is highly recommended to consult with your local fire department or public health offices for these and other potential solutions. Local fire departments could also assist with testing the number of devices needed and best placement of canisters for the type and size of boxes you have.

- **Work with First Responders on Ballot Drop Box Incident Response Considerations.** Talk to your local law enforcement, fire department, and other first responders about potential response considerations. Specifically discuss alternative firefighting options such as CO2 and dry chemicals that avoid water and other methods that would further damage ballots. Ensure your local law enforcement have your after-hours contact information. Consider doing a quick rehearsal or tabletop exercise in your office to test your drop box incident response plan and train your teams on the plan.

## Post-Incident Recovery Actions

- **Public Communication.** When an incident occurs that impacts election operations or security, like damage or destruction to ballot drop boxes or ballots, timely and accurate communication to the public is essential to ensuring confidence in the integrity of the election process. Consider issuing a press release and holding a press conference to explain what happened, the impact on the voting process, and next steps to ensure every eligible voter will have their vote counted as cast. For more information about best practices for public communications, check out the CISA and EAC [Election Infrastructure Response Incident Communications Guide](#).
- **Voter Outreach.** When a voter's ballot is identified as being damaged or destroyed, election offices should have processes in place to notify impacted voters and enable them to request a duplicate ballot. When an incident damages ballots without a means to identify the voter, election officials can pursue a range of outreach methods to reach potentially impacted voters and highlight useful resources like ballot tracking tools. In addition to direct point-to-point outreach to voters, state and local officials can explore communication paths such as press releases and traditional media outreach, social media, or direct to voter mass text alerts. In severe incidents, state and local election officials can work with local emergency managers to leverage their community emergency notification systems.

## Resources for Election Officials

[#Protect2024 | CISA](#)

[Personal Security Considerations Action Guide Critical Infrastructure Workers \(cisa.gov\)](#)

[If You See Something, Say Something® | Homeland Security \(dhs.gov\)](#)

[Physical Security Checklist for Polling Locations | CISA](#)

[Last Mile Products | CISA](#)

<sup>2</sup> "News Release: Elections Director Tim Scott's statement on incendiary device at County ballot box" Multnomah County, October 28, 2024; <https://www.multco.us/multnomah-county/news/news-release-elections-director-tim-scott%E2%80%99s-statement-incendiary-device-county>.