BLOW THE WHISTLE
ON ELECTION INTERFERENCE

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Title of Program: Blow the Whistle on Election Interference

Project Lead: Jerry Bonnet, General Counsel

Description of the Program: In 2016 state Election Administration became part of our "national critical infrastructure". Following that designation and particularly leading up to the 2024 local, state, and federal elections, collaboration and coordination between state and federal Homeland Security Departments, emergency response agencies, law enforcement and election administrators, in the interest of election security and safety, has been a high priority for Indiana's chief election officer, Secretary of State Diego Morales and his team. The Indiana Secretary of State team took proactive measures to safeguard the integrity of our state's elections by hosting a series of regional training and coordination sessions for election administrators and community first responders, including local IT directors, Emergency Management Offices, and law enforcement agency personnel.

Subject Area of Nomination: Elections

Executive Summary

Ensuring the Safety and security of Indiana's elections is a top priority for Secretary of State Diego Morales. In 2016 state Election Administration became part of our "national critical infrastructure". Following that designation and particularly leading up to the 2024 local, state, and federal elections, collaboration and coordination between state and federal Homeland Security Departments, emergency response agencies, law enforcement and election administrators, the interest of election security and safety, has been a high priority for Indiana's chief election officer, Indiana Secretary of State Diego Morales and his team.

Which is how our new program came to fruition. Secretary Morales' Department of Homeland Security grant funded program for election security and safety situational awareness, preparedness, and responding agency coordination was named: "Blow the Whistle on Election Interference". As the Secretary of State's office, we can do a lot, but we can't do everything and to be able to call on local, state, and federal law enforcement, leaders and election administrators is vital in administering elections the people of Indiana expect and deserve.

The Secretary of State's office put together a comprehensive 127-page handbook on Election Safety, Security, and Integrity Assessment, Response and Coordination. 600 copies of this handbook were printed and sent across the state. They were distributed to County Clerks and Election Administration offices, local law enforcement agencies, county emergency management offices, state and federal emergency management offices, Indiana legislators and Congressional delegation, members of the National Association of Secretary of States Election Committee, the Voting System Technical Oversight Program at Ball State University, and the U.S. Election Assistance Commission.

What they found inside our handbook was a reference guide for "what if" situations that could happen at any polling location across the state and even across the country. It included, County Election and Polling Place Security Plans, Security Resources for Election Infrastructure, the Justice Departments effort to secure elections, Handling Suspicious Election Mail, Threat, Hazard & Risk Assessment Guide, De-Escalation – 5 Purposeful Actions, Elections and Generative AI risks and more.

The challenges and concerns election officials, election workers, and voters face are unprecedented. The engagement of Indiana County support infrastructure, consisting of Clerks and Election Boards, Sheriffs and local law enforcement, Prosecutors, and Emergency Management Services is more important than ever. We know, threats to election security are diverse and wide-ranging.

This handbook helped the Secretary of State's office, along with state and federal first-responder agencies prepare for the elections. From monitoring the threat landscape, studying the latest mitigation and response techniques, to providing Narcan for emergency use and hands-on assistance. It was a way to show we are all working together and we want to provide safe and secure elections.

We knew, the handbooks that were sent across our state would be just the beginning. And although, they proved to be a great resource, we needed to provide these officials with a more hands on learning experience. Whether they were new to the Election Administration landscape or had been a part of the process for decades, we had to make sure officials and leaders in all 92 counties of Indiana were on the same page, and knew how to handle every scenario brought their way. That's when the Secretary of State's office, along with Indiana DHS and CISA, hosted tabletop election incident exercise conferences.

Indiana's "Blow the Whistle on Election Interference" program for 2024 involved a series of 6 regional tabletop election incident exercise conferences, co-presented by the Secretary of State, Indiana DHS, and CISA. The program includes an introductory video, handbook, lanyards with referee whistles and "election interference" penalty cards. The conferences were well received and attended by over 60 county teams including election administrators, local law enforcement, local IT directors, and local emergency management offices.

It was a way to take proactive measures to safeguard the integrity of the General Election. The exercises are designed to address and respond toa wide range of potential challenges leading up to and on Election Day. Key focus areas included: operational security, cybersecurity and physical security.

Throughout the summer, six regional tabletop exercises were held throughout the state. Exercises were developed using materials created by the Indiana Secretary of State's Office, Indiana Department of Homeland Security, and Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency.

County clerks, election administrators, emergency management officials, sheriffs, and IT directors were encouraged to attend. Attendees were provided the opportunity to hear from state and federal officials, connect with resources, and practice response plans for a wide range of threat situations.

Across the country, and of course, in Indiana a high turnout of voters was expected in the 2024 General Election. We know, voters show up to the polls when they feel strongly about the candidates, and about policies. Secretary Morales and his team wanted to ensure every single person who had a hand in running our elections knew what to do in any "just in case" situation.

 Below, are several testaments from election administrators of all levels from across Indiana who attended at least one of our tabletop exercises.

"St. Joseph County participated in the tabletop exercises and found them to be very helpful. This was a unique opportunity for our county decision makers to discuss in detail, many important issues surrounding the election," Amy Rolfes, St. Joseph County Clerk of the Circuit Court, said. "The guidance and input from subject matter experts was invaluable in preparing action plans for the 2024 general election. We will use this information for future elections as well."

"The regional tabletop exercises hosted by the Secretary of State's office were invaluable in strengthening the partnership between local, state, and federal election officials," said Dustin Renner, Director of Elections, Indiana Secretary of State's Office. "These exercises provided a collaborative platform to identify potential challenges and refine our response strategies, ensuring that Indiana's elections remain secure and efficient for all Hoosier voters. By simulating real-world scenarios, we've enhanced our readiness and built stronger, more resilient election systems across the state."

"The tabletop exercises that the Indiana Secretary of State's Office and CISA hosted prior to the election were essential for the counties in preparing for the elections. The exercise provided a critical opportunity for different Department heads to gather and discuss real-world scenarios, test response strategies, and identify potential gaps in planning," Lisa Gray, Training and Assessment Specialist for the Voting System Technical Oversight Program, said. "By facilitating a space for these key Department heads to work through the exercises, it ensured a more resilient, efficient, and secure electoral process for counties, ultimately fostering trust and confidence among voters in Indiana."

"The six tabletop exercises, not only prepared clerks for the worst-case scenarios they faced (e.g. cyber-attacks, active shooter, weather, bombs threats, etc), but more importantly, the events connected the clerks with the valuable departments within their county that would be assisting in addressing any crisis or emergency that happens during the election cycle. This included connecting clerks with their local emergency managers, Information technology departments or service providers, law enforcement, and leadership," Chetrice Mosley-Romero, Cybersecurity State Coordinator, Indiana, said. "Moreover, these tabletop exercises set the stage for further discussions and use of critical cybersecurity and physical security resources offered by the state and federal partners that many were not aware of or didn't know how to internally coordinate within their counties in an efficient way. The impact of these tabletop exercises will be felt past the election season, because not only were scenarios discussed for election day, but relationships were developed, and areas of the county were better understood so that the security and integrity of the elections was fortified further."

Here are few highlights we collected from our tabletop exercises and those who attended:

- Since the spring, CISA has effectively reached out to all 92 counites through presentations at 5 clerk conferences (2 Spring, 1 Summer, and 2 Fall) and a booth presence at 3 of them.

- CISA was able to exercise and offer critical state and federal services to 62 of the 92 counties (72% of the entire state)

- 85% of all counties that attended had the required participants to get the most out of the day (clerks, EMAs, and information technology) at the exercise. Many of the counties openly admitted this is the first time they all sat down to discuss election preparation. Additional attendees included law enforcement, election administrators, county auditor, and commissioners. The biggest reason IT providers did not show was because they were MSPs and they would have charged to be there, which is completely fair.

- Still waiting on the final numbers, but at initial look we have more than 20 who signed up for a cyber assessment as well as vulnerability scanning. More to come on follow ups being made!

- In addition to the several counties that Steven B. have done SAFEs for, **28 counties** signed up for SAFE or an assist visit **at the TTX**. The majority of the SAFEs included multiple locations; this included **35 Assist Visits in Marion County (our largest county of voters)** for Polling locations, St Joesph County had 5 polling locations and so on.

- M**ore than 50 counties** requested a template and assistance in developing a cyber incident response plan at the TTX.

- 56 staff is what was required to hold all six exercises.

    o CISA: 18

    o Indiana Dept of Homeland Security: 9

    o Purdue CyberTap: 6

    o VSTOP: 11

    o Secretary of State Office: 7

    o Indiana Office of Technology: 1

    o Indiana Election Division: 4

- Total attendees from all six exercises: 439

    - July 31 = 72 attendees

    - Aug 1 = 79 attendees

    - Aug 7 = 67 attendees

    - Aug 8 = 63 attendees

    - Sep 5 = 72 attendees

    - Sept 6 = 86 attendees

Here are remarkable survey results from attendees:

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how satisfied are they with the overall structure and organization of the CISA tabletop exercise? **95% selected an 8 or higher**

2. On a scale of 1 to 10, what is the likelihood that they would attend another CISA tabletop exercise? **93% selected an 8 or higher**

3. **100 % felt** the scenarios were very realistic (88%) or moderately realistic (12%).

4. **100 % felt** they were very engaged (77%) or moderately engaged (23%).

5. **97% were** very satisfied (92%) or somewhat satisfied (5%) with the lead facilitator.

6. **94% were** very satisfied (91%) or somewhat satisfied (3%) with the facilitator at their table.

7. **97% found** the exercise very helpful (85%) or somewhat helpful (12%) in preparing their county for the 2024 elections.

8. **97% found** the resources shared through the day very helpful (87%) or somewhat helpful (10%) to their county.

Here are a few positive comments of what participants liked the most about the exercise. This is just a sampling of the **more than 250 positive comments**:

- "How it engaged different departments from the county that had no idea the resources each other shared to benefit one another."

- "Having most of the county's counterparts here for the exercises. It was helpful to make decisions with almost everyone available."

- "Getting to know other key players better and learning about other resources available to us. "

- "I enjoyed the discussions on the modules. The facilitator was excellent for asking questions about how we handled different aspects. "

- "Facilitator & Note taker at each table to keep track and offer solutions and ideas to consider. "

- "Liked the visual time keeping method too! FREE resources!! :) Grouping of info and scenarios with several breaks. Autonomy for breaks/snacks. Free flow of conversation with info sharing. Loved the handouts, contacts, visuals, & so on. Happy about double-sided printing too! :)"

- "Networking with county EMA (emergency manager), first-time meeting :)"

Supporting Materials

This video was created by the Secretary of State's Office and shown at each of the tabletop exercises as well as the Indiana Executive Council on Cybersecurity.

Experts interviewed in the five -minute video included the state's executive director of the Indiana Department of Homeland Security, specialized experts in de-escalation training, Indiana State Police, administrators with Voting System Technical Oversight Program, and officials with the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency.

View the video here: https://youtu.be/UauFEijPnYM

Blow the Whistle on Election Interference

Blow the Whistle on Election Interference cover, Index of topics, and disclaimers. Copies of this book were sent across Indiana to elected leaders, election administrators and more.
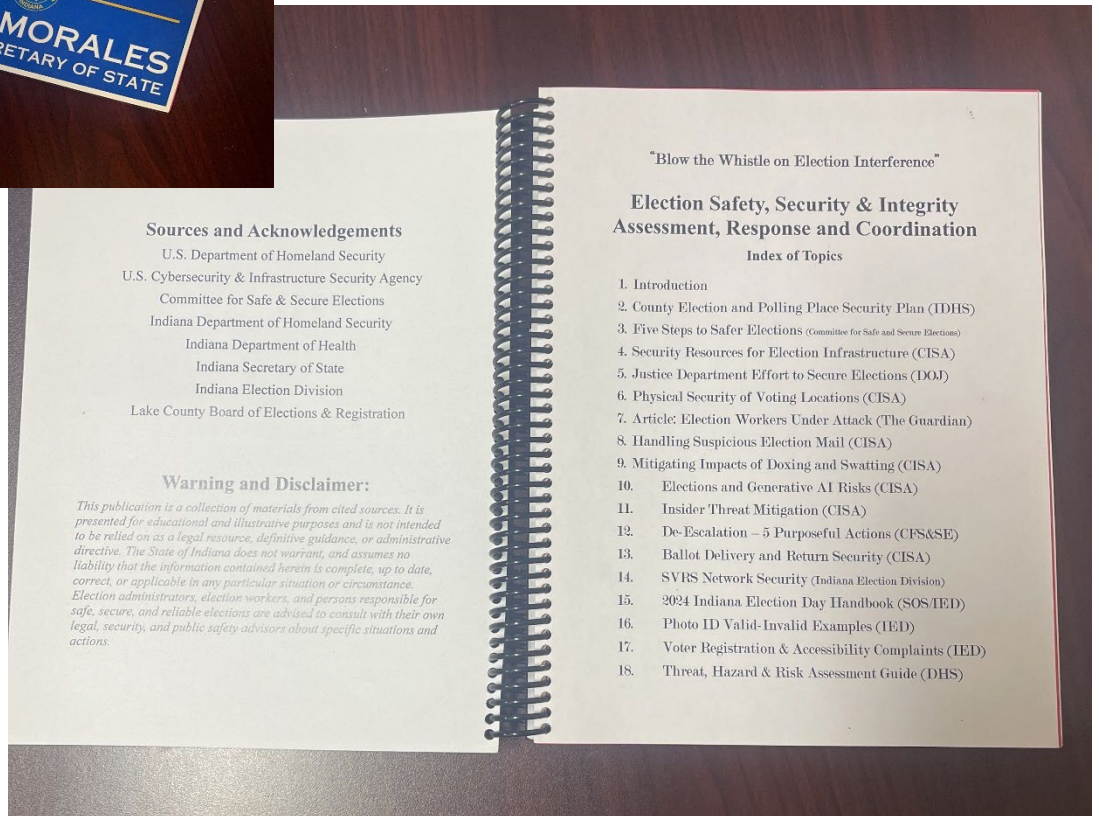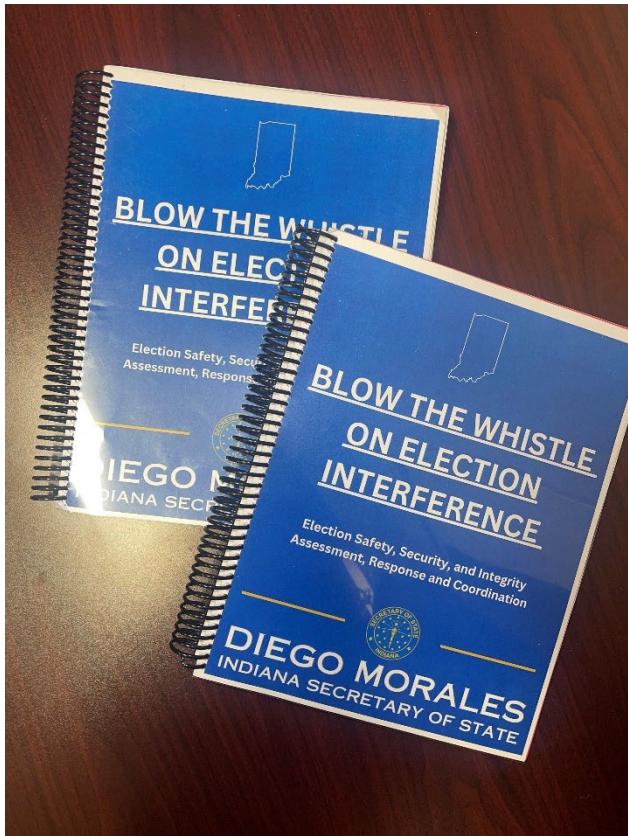
Sources and Acknowledgements

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

U.S. Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency

Committee for Safe & Secure Elections

Indiana Department of Homeland Security

Indiana Department of Health

Indiana Secretary of State

Indiana Election Division

Lake County Board of Elections & Registration

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"Blow the Whistle on Election Interference"

Election Safety, Security & Integrity Assessment, Response and Coordination

Index of Topics

Along with the books, each recipient received a whistle and "penalty" cards. Similar to penalty cards you might see during a soccer game. Each card was meant to serve as a quick reference if anything happened at a polling location. From "Green means Go!" citing following procedures and calling the necessary authorities. To "Black means stop!" citing medical emergencies, violent threats, or suspicious materials. It was an interactive way for election officials to know what to do in any situation.

Pictures from several of our Tabletop exercises