

By Allison Churchill

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New Jersey election officials are calling their emergency election strategy a “catastrophe,” several sources are reporting.

A directive from Lieutenant Governor Kim Guadagno stated: “Notwithstanding Hurricane Sandy and its aftermath, the State of New Jersey is committed to holding a fair, open, transparent, and accessible election on Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2012.”

The Garden State announced on Sunday that residents could e-mail or fax in an application to vote by those methods, so people who couldn’t get to their assigned polling location would still be able to vote. Perhaps in a hint of foreshadowing, officials also announced that displaced voters and first responders could vote by provisional ballot at a polling place other than their county of registration.

But they didn’t quite seem to be prepared for those methods. Some of the e-mails to county election clerks bounced back to the senders.

A member of the NY-NJ Metro Area Mountaineers Facebook group claimed the provisions were good ideas in theory, but issues such as fraud could arise. “I think the problem was not enough time to get e-mail ballots approved, and not enough people to approve them,” said Damien Keemss, of Bloomfield, N.J.

Fraud was certainly possible. In the directive from the lieutenant governor, voters are asked to send a waiver of secrecy with their electronic votes. It also points out that the county

boards of elections would need to verify that voters didn't vote both at a polling place and through a paper ballot.

Voting through extraordinary measures also affected local elections. The provisional ballots only included the general and state elections. Matt Blaze, a computer

JERSEY

scientist at University of Pennsylvania, said he thinks some local contests might "hinge on ballots that may or may not be valid." Indeed, Essex County, the one having the most problems with electronic voting, leaned toward the Democrat candidate in the presidential, senate, and all 12 House districts with a seat open, but in at least three districts, not all their votes were counted yet as of Wednesday afternoon.

At of 11:14 p.m. Tuesday, only 74 percent of New Jersey's votes were in. President Barack Obama was called the winner of the state earlier though, when less than 70 percent were in.

Many of the counties, especially those hit hardest by Sandy, had less than half their votes counted. The American Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit against Essex County, where the state's largest city, Newark, is located, because voters weren't getting their e-mail ballots, Bob Sullivan of NBC.com reported.

Christopher J. Durkin, the Essex County Clerk, posted his personal e-mail address on the West Orange, N.J., Facebook page Sunday to try to ease some of the strain on the county's

official e-mail address. A nice idea, but as Markus Majer, commented at 9:44 Tuesday evening, the account could be easily hacked.

In Hudson County, hit especially hard by Sandy, eight officials tried to get through 3,300 requests as of Tuesday, Sullivan's report said.

Some counties figured out their storm plan well ahead of time. Lisa Yoder Higgs, another NY-NJ Metro Area Mountaineer, said Morris County changed the voting location for Washington Township in advance of the storm. Higgs complimented the officials on

JERSEY

their "good planning." Pat Osborne, a High Bridge resident of the same group, said his site did not have power until Monday, but the sites still opened.

It is good to know that New Jersey tried so hard to help more people vote, as opposed to the states that tried to prevent people from voting. But if it wants those votes to count, it cannot leave those votes subject to question.