How Do I Know When I'm Done?

Two persons in separate precincts abandon their machines without "closing out." In one case, the workers yelled after, and ran to catch, the voter before she left. She closed out and left the precinct with a chagrined look on her face. In the other case, workers did not observe the problem before the voter left. After discovering the abandoned station, two of them sat over the machine for about three minutes to close it out. 

The ballot instructions posted in each precinct indicate that the voter must press a selection at the top of the last screen that states "End All Voting." It appears that these voters had missed that instruction.

Reported by Josephine Scott in Westland, Michigan, November 2, 2004

UniLect Patriot Voting System

Polling Place Layout:

"I did the best I could."

The precinct captain told me that he had received three hours training. When I asked if he had any training in the layout of the polling place, he said, "No. This is a new room, I did the best I could." When I asked him how he accommodated wheelchair voters, he said that he had only one person in this precinct in a wheelchair, and when this person came in, he would lower one of the voting booths; but he didn’t want to give up one of his booths until that point.

Reported by Carol Barnum in Fulton County, Georgia, November 2, 2004

Diebold Election System

Even People with Mild Disabilities Might Need Assistance

There were two elderly people who needed assistance and were escorted from station to station. A third person looked like he should have received assistance (but did not get any). He had a portable stool that he sat on while he waited on a long line, picking it up and moving it as the line moved forward.

When he reached the table where a number of other lines were formed to confirm registration, he was escorted to the end of the line for the P-Z list of names (where he had to wait again, dragging his stool along as the line inch ed forward). After he was through the process to get a ballot, he had to stand to vote (all of the voting machines were at the same height so he did not appear to have any other options).

Reported by Carol Barnum in Fulton County, Georgia, November 2, 2004

Diebold Election System

Instructions can Hurt More Than They Help

This next observation echoes the situation in Palm Beach County, Florida, in 2000: voters were instructed to "Vote Every Page"—instructions that were wrong in a butterfly ballot and probably encouraged people to invalidate their ballots through overvoting.

The Diebold machine has some confusing instructions, which you would probably be better off not reading. For example, there were three different arrows pointing in three different directions to show you how to insert your SmartCard:

1. At the top of the screen (as far from the action as possible) was the instruction, "Insert card to start." An arrow pointed up (in the upper left of the screen) to this instruction.

2. At the bottom of the screen in the lower right, an arrow pointed to the right with the instruction, "Please insert your card.

3. The hardware to accept the card was below the machine on the flat surface of the booth and there was an arrow pointing up to insert the card.

Reported by Carol Barnum in Fulton County, Georgia, November 2, 2004

Diebold Election System

Status Messages can be Confusing

At the lower right of the screen, in a task bar at the bottom, was the word "charging" and a number count—a fairly small number: ninety-one. Both made me slightly anxious, as (1) I wasn’t sure if "charging" meant that the machine was not yet ready to record my vote (I thought of the metaphor of my cell phone charging for use), and (2) I didn’t understand why so few votes had been counted on this machine, as I had seen far more people in line and there were only eleven voting machines. I later learned that the machines have to be recertified every hour and the number of votes confirmed and then reset.

Reported by Carol Barnum in Fulton County, Georgia, November 2, 2004

Diebold Election System
The fundamental social nature of voting was clearly evident: neighbors greeted each other, couples voted together, and voters and poll workers engaged in conversations. At one station, a volunteer asked that a woman who was wearing a T-shirt and jeans be allowed to go in alone, as a mother and son. She went into the voting booth, and the son was seen struggling not only with the cards and the machine, but also with the curtain, telling her to look at the top or side of the machine. The voter had signed in and gone into the booth, was noticed the problem. She got him to the right to find the letter for my last name (Q). He was told that there were about twenty cards at the precinct. It was at that point that it really struck me that there was no backup for my vote. 

Although there were four precincts, the printout tape from each machine was posted at the exit. I saw a poll worker take the machine standing right outside. The voter had signed in and gone into the booth. There was a stack of the voting cards on the table at the exit. I saw a poll worker take the card table at the exit. I saw a poll worker take the card table at the exit. I saw a poll worker take the cards and he told me they were taped in a wad across the door.

False Transparency of Information

At the end of the day, a copy of the printout tape from each machine was posted outside the door. This is a new state law, so that anyone can inspect the results of each precinct. There was a stack of the voting cards on the table at the exit. I saw a poll worker take the cards and he told me they were taped in a wad across the door. There was no line, but it was clear that they had seen this type of long wait in the past. Reported by Josephine Scott in Westland, Michigan, November 2, 2004

UniLect Patriot Voting System

November 2, 2004

Reported by Whitney Quesenbery in Anderson, South Carolina Early Voting, October 2004

UniLect Patriot Voting System

Proof Your Ballot

A group in Travis County, Texas reported that some voters had inadvertently changed their ballots. Reported by Whitney Quesenbery in Anderson, South Carolina Early Voting, October 2004

UniLect Patriot Voting System

Audio Ballots are Hard to Use if There is Too Much Background Noise

This location had approximately fifty machines within the polling place. The noise level was so high it would have been impossible to use voice system to interact with the equipment. For wheelchair voters, voting equipment was available, but both a son and a son's friend voted. Unfortunately, this kind of accommodation eliminated the privacy of their voting. One voter shared his frustration with the lack of independency and how his wife had to read the choices and select the buttons for him. Reported by J. R. Hardinger, Access Board, from Travis County, Texas, November 2, 2004

ES&S iVotronic Touchscreen Voting System

How Do I Know When I'm Done? Part Two

Although the eSlate presents a big message saying that you are done and can leave, people had a bewildered look when they turned away from the screen. This was criticized by the judge who agreed that people are used to something tangible happening when they are done voting. At this polling place, voters were asked to vote for one candidate through an ambiguous interaction with their Hart Intercivic eSlate. They were not able to store up to 10,500 votes, but the limit was actually set to 3,005. Testing after the election confirmed that, although there was an statewide election for agriculture commissioner because the margin of victory was only 2,287—less than the number of last votes. 

CartoBlock North Carolina Early Voting, October 2004