

Precinct Based Optical Scan Voting Systems

Until recently in New York State, election officials, legislators, and activists have only considered one possible replacement for our lever machines – electronic touch screen voting machines (DREs). But DREs, including those with a voter verified paper ballot (VVPB), raise many questions about reliability, auditability, usability, and cost. Another option exists which must be considered here in New York.

Paper ballots and precinct based optical scan voting systems, augmented by ballot marking devices to provide accessibility for voters with disabilities, are fully compliant with the provisions of the Help America to Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA). In addition, such systems offer many advantages over electronic touch screen voting machines of all types.

Approximately 25% of jurisdictions across the country use paper ballot and optical scan systems. Michigan, Arizona, and Ohio are using optical scan systems to comply with HAVA requirements in 2006. We must consider doing the same here in New York.

Below are links to online resources about paper ballot/optical scan systems.

Video Demonstrations

Many New Yorkers have never used an optical scan system, and have difficulty envisioning how it works. Here are two links to online videos showing how these systems are used in an election.

Demonstration video prepared by the Rock Island, IL County Clerk:

This demonstrates the “bubble mark” system, where the voter fills in the bubble next to their choice.

<http://ricoclerk.revealed.net/election/videoe.wmv>

Demonstration video from the Michigan Secretary of State office:

This demonstrates the Optech system, where the voter marks their ballot by making a line to connect the head and tail of arrows next to the candidate.

<http://www.sos.state.mi.us/election/votesys/equipment/accuvote>

Accessibility with Optical Scan Systems

With paper ballot systems, disabled voters can use a ballot marking device. This provides the identical accessibility features (audio, sip and puff, etc.) as DREs, but for paper ballots. Ballot marking devices do not record or count votes electronically, they only mark a paper ballot for the voter. They are essentially a “computerized marking pen”. The votes are recorded on a standard optical scan ballot, and the completed ballot is read by precinct-based optical scanner.

A description of ballot marking devices:

<http://www.nyvv.org/paperballotBallotMarkers.htm>

Video Demonstration of the AutoMark ballot marker at the National Federation of the Blind:

<http://www.voiceofthenationsblind.org/transcripts/80/automark-voter-assist-terminal-demonstration>

A fact sheet about the AutoMark can be downloaded here:

<http://www.essvote.com/HTML/docs/AutoMark.pdf>

Advantages of Optical Scan Systems over DREs

Precinct based optical scan systems offer many advantages over DREs. We’ve prepared a document listing some of them here:

<http://www.nyvv.org/doc/AdvantagesPaperBallots.pdf>

New Yorkers for Verified Voting has more information about optical scan systems on our website. Our Paper Ballots for New York home page can be found here:

<http://www.nyvv.org/paperballotHome.htm>