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## Poll Officials Preparing For a Record Election Day

More Employees, Equipment Coming

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Maryland election officials are buying more electronic polling books, leasing additional voting machines and looking for more election judges as they gear up for what is expected to be a record-high voter turnout in November.

"We've had 85 percent turnout in Charles County before, so it's nothing new to us," said Tracy Dickerson, election director in Charles. "We would love to see 100 percent turnout, because whether we have a 2 percent turnout or we have a 100 percent turnout, we do the same amount of work."

Officials said they expect more than 80 percent of registered voters to come out on Election Day, largely because the presidential election features no incumbent. They said voters should expect lines -- especially if they try to vote during peak morning and evening hours.

"There's not a thing we can do to avoid the long lines on Election Day," said Marjorie Roher, a spokeswoman for the Montgomery County Board of Elections. "Certainly, you've got an open-seated presidential race with some very interesting candidates, and you've got a lot of interest in the election for primarily that reason."

Montgomery officials are trying to secure as many as 65 new touch-screen voting machines and are thinking about stationing an additional election judge at each polling place, Roher said. The county faced significant problems in the 2006 primary election when someone forgot the plastic cards needed to operate the voting machines, but Roher said those problems are long past.

"We learned from that mistake, and we proved that we learned from that mistake based on our performance in the last four elections," she said.

In St. Mary's County, officials are leasing 20 new machines and buying 10 books. In Charles County, officials are leasing 40 new machines and buying 10 books.

The total cost of the additional equipment statewide is not yet known, officials said. Polling books cost about \$3,000 each, and jurisdictions provided different cost estimates for leasing voting machines -- from \$40 to \$500 apiece.

"You can't put a price tag on a vote," said Guy Mickley, deputy elections director in Howard County and president of the Maryland Association of Election Officials.

Many counties also want to add election judges to their ranks, initially serving as greeters to assure that voters are in the right precinct. St. Mary's County, for example, will try to station a greeter at every

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precinct, provided it gets enough staff.

Right now, the county is down about 30 people, said Brenda Burch, director of the St. Mary's County of Board of Elections. But with a pay rate of \$125 for working Election Day and \$30 for completing the training, she said she has "no qualms about saying that we'll have them very shortly."

Officials are also turning to voters for help in making sure Election Day runs smoothly. They are asking residents to review sample ballots, distributed before and on Election Day, and call their boards of elections to confirm their registration and polling place. The deadline to register is 9 p.m. Oct. 14.

Officials are also asking voters to go to the polls between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., which is the best time range to avoid lines, they said.

In the last presidential election, about 78 percent of registered voters turned out statewide. In this year's primary, about 43 percent turned out, according to unofficial totals on the State Board of Elections Web site.

Officials said they expect turnout this year will surpass either of those numbers, and the number of voters is also likely to be higher because of an increase in registrations.

"You can't really base it on past history, because you've got different folks in the mix," said Montgomery County's Roher. "This is going to be a really big election."

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