

Why A Sample Hand-Count Is Important For Boulder County Elections – And How To Make It Happen

August 3, 2004

Summary:

Boulder County will count our paper ballots using brand-new, computerized scanners. These scanner systems could have undiscovered software bugs or other computer problems which could affect the outcome of the election. To help guard against this scenario, the County should also hand count a small, but statistically-significant number of the "live" paper ballots. The human interpretation of each ballot would then be compared to the computer interpretation of the same ballot. Any differences would be investigated and resolved. This ensures that the optical scan systems are counting the ballots the same way that humans would.

The machine problems might seem theoretical. But other counties have already experienced them. In March, in Alameda County, California, an vote-counting system similar to Boulder County's new system wrongly awarded 9,000 Democratic votes to a Socialist candidate. Fortunately, the unusual pattern raised red flags with vigilant officials. But if the votes had gone to a more popular candidate, the problem might never have been caught. Boulder County's new systems could experience a similar problem, and without adoption of a plan like the one above, we might never find out about it.

For the plan to work, our new election computers must generate a printed report showing the computer's interpretation of each ballot. But Boulder County's new systems, made by Hart InterCivic, do not currently support such a report. Boulder County should encourage Hart to demonstrate the quality of their systems by implementing this report in time for the 2004 general election.

Contents:

1. Sample "scanner ballot interpretation report"
2. Optical-scan problems in Napa County, CA
([Absentee Miscount Throws At Least Five Races Into Doubt](#), *Napa Valley Register*, March 13, 2004)
3. Optical-scan problems in Alameda County and San Diego County, CA
([Diebold Reports Multiple Problems](#), *Tri-Valley Herald*, April 13, 2004)
4. California Elections Code Section 15360