Security concern forces half of Ohio's counties to use paper pollbooks for May election

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COLUMBUS, Ohio --A security violation involving an electronic pollbook in Perry County is prompting half of Ohio counties to check voters in using paper pollbooks for the May 6 election.

The device--a tablet-style electronic similar to an iPad--was intended to check voters in on Election Day.

Perry County never used it for an election. Instead, local officials reported irregularities that "violated Ohio's election security standards."

"I've directed our Election Integrity Unit and cybersecurity team to work with the Perry County Board of Elections to analyze the equipment purchased by the board... ," Secretary of State Frank LaRose said in a statement. "As an added precaution, I'm directing the boards of elections who use this specific style of pollbook to use paper pollbooks for the May election."

Voters will still cast their ballots electronically, but check-in could take longer as poll workers flip through paper lists to find names and match signatures.

"If it was a presidential election this would have been absolutely horrible," Cuyahoga County Board of Elections Director Anthony Perlatti said. "Even with this not being a major draw election, Cuyahoga has 900,000 registered voters."

Cuyahoga County doesn't have to worry about paper printouts because it doesn't use the same vendor as Perry County.

"Our vendor, Tenex, is not the vendor in question," Perlatti said. "We are able to use our electronic pollbooks on Election Day."

The same goes for Ohio's other large, population-dense counties like Franklin, Lucas, and Hamilton, which will continue using electronic pollbooks as planned.

In Northeast Ohio, several counties will switch to paper check-ins for the May 6 primary, including Lorain, Medina, Portage and Geauga counties.

Lake, Summit, and Stark counties will use electronic systems.

Ashtabula County stands out for a different reason.

It's one of just three counties in Ohio that doesn't use electronic pollbooks at all.

Board of Elections Director John Mead said Ashtabula switched back to paper after the 2020 election and is helping LaRose's office train other counties on using paper pollbooks ahead of next week's primary.