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New machines puzzle voters, officials

Training is blamed for early glitches that had people turned away or given wrong ballots. But things went smoother later.

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Denver election judges blamed "confusing" training for difficulties during Tuesday's primary debut of the city's electronic voting machines.

Problems as simple as not finding an "on" switch kept voters from using the new machines at some of the 47 vote centers

"The training and recruiting was a real problem today," said Denis Berckefeldt, a spokesman for City Auditor Dennis Gallagher. "We've had concerns about this, and it was pooh-poohed by the (city Election) Commission."

In addition to new machines, Tuesday was Denver's first use of centralized vote centers rather than neighborhood precincts

Because of relatively low turnout - only 12,960 people voted in person Tuesday - judges at problem sites fell back on the available older machines. There were only a few reports of voters being turned away

Still, election judge Lori Chappell said, "Can you imagine if this was in November?"

About 42,310 Denver residents voted in the primary, but 27,866 of those voted absentee and 1,484 voted early. It is expected that far more of the 268,186 active voters in Denver will turn out in November

Some election judges complained that training had been inadequate.

"It was so confusing," said Mary "Teri" Colburn, who has been an election judge for 40 years. "They would say, 'This is the way you could do it, or you could do it this way, or you might do this.'"

Judges at Washington Park Recreation Center couldn't immediately get their machines running.

But that wasn't the only problem. State House Speaker Andrew Romanoff was the second person to try to vote on one of the new machines, but his vote for himself did not print properly.

"It's definitely a little concerning," said Romanoff. "I'm the only one running in my race, so if I lose I will really be concerned."

A computer system to track registered voters overloaded and caused sites to be down for 30 minutes or more, so judges had to call in and verify voters.

At Denver Botanic Gardens, new machines sat unused until nearly 9:30 a.m. Residents such as Barry Boughman said they were directed to another center when they showed up at 7 a.m.

Election Commissioner Sandy Adams had to show poll workers how to boot the machines in order to get them running.

And even she misprogrammed a voting card.

That voter - who did not want his name used - said his voting experience went "very, very, very poorly."

There were also scattered reports of voters getting the wrong ballot, as happened with a Denver Post photographer and state House candidate Alfredo Hernandez.



"Here I was looking for my name because I'd like to vote for myself," Hernandez said

Election Commission executive director John Gaydeski chalked up the trouble to election judges being human - not to the 240 Sequoia machines the city purchased this spring with a \$1.4 million federal grant

"The machinery is doing fine," he said. "The only issues we have had are related to human error."

City Councilwoman Rosemary Rodríguez said she asked Gaydeski to review problems in preparation for November.

Election Commission operations director Matt Crane said each election judge went through a three-hour training course. Judges were trained based on tasks, so some knew how to work election machines while others knew about the computerized polling book.

"Unfortunately, we are going to have some growing pains," Crane said. "I think you will see a different experience as the day goes on."

Indeed, by noon, most problems were resolved. And many centers had no trouble.

"Things have gone really smoothly," election judge Lauren Swain said. She was working at the Highland Senior Center and said it was helpful that a fellow judge had worked early voting last week.

"He just came in and got everything set up," Swain said.

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