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**Elections Commission spokesman disputes claim of ‘problematic’ vote tabulation practices**

Wisconsin Elections Commission spokesman Reid Mangey is strongly disputing the notion that the practice of auditing election ballots by running them through vote tabulation devices is problematic.

WisPolitics.com recently reported that vote tabulation machines send unofficial results through the internet and those results are received by a server and a number of back-end systems that are connected to the internet through a firewall.

Freelance journalist Kim Zetter was contacted by a group of 10 researchers who uncovered nearly three dozen elections systems across 10 states, including Wisconsin, that were connected to the internet and [published the group’s findings in the tech publication Motherboard](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/3kxzk9/exclusive-critical-us-election-systems-have-been-left-exposed-online-despite-official-denials).

The researchers’ initial sweep found Elections Systems & Software voting machines in six counties were connected to the internet and dangerously vulnerable to hackers: Outagamie, Dodge, Milwaukee, St. Croix, Columbia and Waukesha counties. A later check then found Eau Claire County also had equipment connected to the internet.

Zetter told WisPolitics.com in an interview that because the back-end systems had been left online for up to a year at a time in some cases, the best form of insurance against hackers who may have penetrated the voting systems and deposited malware in that period of time would be a manual recount of ballots by elections officials.

Zetter found in the course of her reporting, though, that “some of those counties actually did do a manual examination of the paper ballots and others simply just ran those ballots right through the same software again.”

Magney in an email strongly pushed back on the notion that this practice is problematic, telling WisPolitics.com that “all the voting equipment used in the recount was reprogrammed.” The email was received after WisPolitics.com published the original story Aug. 30.

But Zetter said reprogramming the machines doesn’t do anything to solve the problem since the elections management systems used to do the reprogramming are connected to the firewall and thus vulnerable to hackers.

Magney also clarified discrepancies between the account he gave to WisPolitics.com and the one Security Lead Tony Bridges gave to Zetter as to why it took WEC officials nearly a year to contact the counties in question after the research group reached to inform Bridges that systems were online.

Before publishing her story, Zetter reached out to Bridges on July 31, 2019. He told her that he had acted on the information he received from the researchers roughly 12 months before, “advising all of the counties to disconnect their systems when not in use for elections.”

Zetter reported Bridges was surprised to learn that several counties still had systems online and contacted them again, at which point the group of researchers saw all but Milwaukee and Eau Claire counties drop off its monitoring system. Milwaukee County was in the midst of a special election at the time while Eau Claire County had not been identified in the initial sweep.

But Magney told WisPolitics.com that when Bridges was initially alerted by the researchers about the vulnerability in the later summer of 2018, “he alerted someone on our staff about that” and “reached out to at least one county clerk” but said Bridges does not recall “which one he talked to.”

The WEC spokesman later clarified in an email that members of the public contact WEC regularly with concerns about election security.

“However, it is not always clear whether their concerns are based on credible information, misinformation or misunderstandings,” he said.

Still, Magney acknowledged that it was only after Zetter reached out in July 2019, shortly before the Aug. 8 story and made it clear to Bridges that there would be press coverage of the vulnerabilities that WEC officials acted.

After the publication of the WisPolitics.com story, Magney conceded that Bridges told Zetter he had contacted the six counties, but later became unsure and “felt he had misspoken” when recounting events that had taken place roughly a year before the conversation. Magney said Bridges clarified with Zetter that he may not have contacted all the counties.

*The Capitol Report is written by editorial staff at WisPolitics.com, a nonpartisan, Madison-based news service that specializes in coverage of government and politics, and is distributed for publication by members of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association.*

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