Precautions Being Taken
With New Voting Machines

Associated Press

The new voting machines that will be used in 25 Connecticut cities and towns next week are vulnerable to tampering, but state officials are taking steps to make sure they’re not compromised, according to a report released Tuesday by the University of Connecticut.

The optical scan devices, which automatically read paper ballots filled out by voters, can be compromised in a matter of minutes by tactics such as neutralizing one candidate so his or her votes aren’t counted or swapping the votes of two candidates, the report said.

"Such tabulation corruptions can lay dormant until the Election Day, thus avoiding detection through pre-election tests," according to the report.

But the report credits the secretary of the state’s office for implementing new security procedures to protect the machines.

Alex Shvartsman is the UConn computer science and engineering professor who heads up a team of professors known as the Voting Technology Research Center, which is advising the secretary of the state’s office. He said the state has taken important steps, such as strict rules for how the machines get from the supplier to polling places, tamper-resistant packaging of the machines and planned post-election audits.

"If nobody touches the devices, if there is an unbroken chain of custody from the supplier to the polling place, then we’re very confident that nothing can go wrong with them — short of a mechanical malfunction," Shvartsman said.

The optical scan machines are first being used in 25 towns this election, replacing the old mechanical lever machines.

The rest of the state will use the new devices next year. Nearly 330,000 voters will be affected this year.

With the new system, voters fill out a paper ballot similar to a bubble sheet used for a standardized test and then scan it into a machine for verification.

The technology provides a paper trail for every vote cast, which Shvartsman said makes the devices more reliable than touch screen and other electronic voting machines.