

E-voting machines to be used in 2009 despite warnings

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THE Government intends to use electronic voting machines in local and European elections in 2009, despite recent warnings that they can be manipulated to rig elections.

The e-voting system, comprising approximately 7,500 machines, cost the Government €52 million and was used on a pilot basis in a number of constituencies in the 2002 General Election and second Nice Referendum later that year.

But it was mothballed after the independent Commission on Electronic Voting said prior to the 2004 local and European elections that it did not have requisite confidence in the system.

Since then, further question marks have been raised.

In July this year, the commission issued a second report revealing flaws in the software central to the system. It found the software could be manipulated to change the outcome of a vote and said tests had eliminated the wrong candidate in some cases.

However, the commission said it could recommend the use of the hardware — the machines themselves — if “minor security and usability enhancements” were made. But earlier this month a Dutch lobby group warned that the machines too could be tampered with to enable electoral fraud.

The group, called We Don't Trust These Electronic Voting Machines, showed how microchips in similar e-voting machines could be replaced with relative ease.

The Dutch and Irish machines are manufactured by the same company, Nedap, but Environment and Local Government Minister Dick Roche, who has responsibility for the system, yesterday insisted they would be used.

Speaking on TV3's The Political Party programme, he said: “They will be used in election and referenda after 2007.” Asked if that meant the local and European elections of 2009, he replied: “Probably.

“I'm not going to scrap them — we've actually paid good Irish taxpayers' money for them and I don't think there's any point of throwing them on the scrap-heap when you can store them and correct them.”

The machines are costing almost €700,000 a year to store. In most cases, the Government is paying election officers around the country to store them but Mr Roche said about 60% of the machines would shortly be moved to a centralised army facility, thus reducing the bill.

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