

Central Count Absentee Ballot Processing

Goal

To familiarize clerks with their pre-election duties with respect to canvassing ballots at a central location and to provide the members of the Board of Absentee Ballot Canvassers with practical guidance in processing and canvassing absentee ballots on election day.

Overview

In lieu of the poll workers processing absentee ballots at each polling place on election day, a municipality may opt to canvass all the absentee ballots at a central location. At the Central County location, the Board of Absentee Ballot Canvassers process and count the ballots. Making the switch to the Central Count Absentee process is a substantial procedural change and requires planning and detailed process and a commitment to making it work.

Clerk's Duties

- Shall give at least 48 hours-notice of the meeting of the Board of Absentee Ballot Canvassers under s.7.52, Wis. Stats.
- Notice shall be posted at the town hall and on the municipal website and will include where absentee ballot canvassing is to take place. Additionally, the notice will be provided to any media that has requested municipal meeting notices in accordance with Wisconsin Statute 19.84(1)(b) and municipal policy.
- Will appoint the Board of Absentee Ballot Canvassers in accordance with Wisconsin Statute 7.53(m)(b).
- The Clerk will assign additional election workers to work under the supervision of the Absentee Board of Canvass in accordance with Wisconsin Statute 7.52(1)(b).
- Will ensure that all members of the Board of Absentee Canvassers take an oath of office prior to performing their duties.
- Sends to each polling place a log of all absentee ballots for each Ward within that polling place.
- Brings absentee ballots to location of Board of Absentee Ballot Canvassers.
- Posts on municipal website and posts in office the number of absentee ballots issued, and the number returned prior to 8:00 p.m. on Election Day.
- Issues supplies (Appendix I) to the Absentee Board of Canvass necessary to complete the canvass of absentee ballots.

Board of Absentee Ballot Canvassers

Board of Absentee Ballot Canvassers' Duties

- Convene the Board of Absentee Ballot Canvassers between 7 a.m. and 10 p.m. on Election Day to canvass absentee ballots in accordance with Wisconsin Statute 7.52(1)(a).
- Canvass all absentee ballots received before 8 p.m. in accordance with Wisconsin State Statutes as explained in the Election Day Manual.
- Complete a log of all activity that occurred during the Board of Absentee Ballot Canvassers Meeting.

Operating Procedures

Set-Up

1. Verify the tamper-evident seal number on the door to each tabulator memory device matches with the number provided by the municipal clerk on the EL-104 Inspector's Statement
2. Turn-on/start tabulator(s) and wait for zero tapes to print
3. Verify that all Wards display 0 totals and sign the bottom of the tapes.
4. Announce that the Central Count Absentee Ballot Processing is open for the specified election and record the time of the opening on the Incident Log that will be attached to the EL-104 Inspector's Statement

Processing of Absentee Ballots

1. Record the seal number on the first container of absentee ballots on the Incident Log and open the container
2. Ballots are sorted by ward and alphabetized within each ward. Pull one ward at a time and the absentee ballot log associated with that ward.
3. Pull out an absentee ballot and verify that the name is on the absentee ballot log.
4. Double check the certificate envelope for the voter signature, witness signature and complete address and verify that envelope does not appear to have been tampered with.
5. Read aloud the voter's name and address.
6. Using the tally number sheet assign the voter a number and write that number in the following two places:
 - On the absentee ballot log
 - On the ballot
7. Open the absentee carrier envelope, remove the ballot and verify there is only one ballot, briefly inspect it for any tears or stray marks and verify it contains the municipal clerk's initials and is for the proper ward then insert it into the tabulator.
8. Place the carrier envelope in the Used Certificate Envelopes for Absentee Electors envelope.

9. If there are any errors with the tabulator reading the ballot a message will appear on the screen and follow the instructions to remedy the issue.
10. If there is an error and voter intent cannot be determined, you may use the override function to count all readable votes on the ballot.
11. At the conclusion of processing ballots for that ward, carefully sort through the ballots to search for any eligible write-in votes.
12. Complete the write-in tally sheet for that ward with the eligible write-ins and if there are none, write "none" on the tally sheet provided. Sign the write-in tally sheet.
13. Bundle all of the ballots with rubber bands and place them into the respective ballot bag.
14. Place the absentee log and related forms off to the side and continue with the next Ward's absentee ballots until you are through processing all available ballots.

Processing of Absentee Ballots – Special Situations

Ballot Missing Municipal Clerk's Initials

- Make a note of this in the Incident Log and then process the ballot as normal.

Remade Ballots

Ballots may need to be remade for any of the following reasons:

- The ballot is torn or not readable by the voting equipment
- The ballot is a paper ballot and needs to be remade onto an official ballot
- The voting equipment is unable to read the ballot, but voter intent can be determined
- The voter received the incorrect ballot for their ward

Steps for Remaking a Ballot:

1. Two absentee ballot canvassers must participate in remaking a ballot
2. Retrieve a new ballot for that ward from the municipal clerk's office
3. Assign the remade ballot a number (sequential for each ward beginning with 1) and note this on the new ballot and the original voted ballot in the space provided
4. Document the 'Remade Ballot #__' on the Incident Log
5. Carefully copy votes from original ballot to the new ballot and have your partner verify accuracy and consistency
6. Place the original ballot in the remade ballot envelope
7. Send the remade ballot through the voting equipment

Rejected Ballots

Absentee ballots with an incomplete certification (missing voter or witness signature or missing witness address) should be rejected after 8:00 p.m., which is the deadline for voters to rectify their incomplete certification.

- Note the number of rejected absentee ballots on incident log.
- All rejected absentee ballots may be placed in one carrier envelope after 8:00 p.m.

Voter Returns a Ballot to the Central Count Location

If a voter brings their voted, sealed, absentee ballot to a polling place other than the location designated for central count, instruct them to go central count location. Do not accept any ballots after 8:00 p.m.

Closing Procedures

1. Closing the polls on the voting equipment machines may not occur until after 8:00 p.m.
2. Ensure all ballots have been processed and accounted for.
3. Announce the closing of the Absentee Ballot Canvass out loud.
4. Verify the seal number on the voting equipment memory device access panel matches with the seal number verified at the convening of the absentee ballot canvass and initial on the master Inspector's Statement. If there is a discrepancy in seal numbers, contact the municipal clerk immediately.
5. Remove the seal, document this on the master Incident Log, and open the door to the memory device
6. Push the CLOSE POLLS button or your equipment's equivalent.
7. A minimum of two results tapes will print.
8. Verify totals on the results tape with each Ward's absentee ballot log and record the total number of absentee ballots processed on the Inspector's statement. If any discrepancies are noticed, they should attempt to be resolved at this time.
 - Once results have been verified and totals have been recorded sign the following:
 - Results Tapes
 - Used Certificate Envelope for Absentee Electors envelope(s) OR bag(s) (w/certification sheet attached)
 - Rejected Ballot Envelope(s)
 - Remade Ballot Envelope(s)
 - Ballot Container(s) Certificate
9. Modem Results to the county (where applicable and only when instructed by the municipal clerk).
10. Shut down the voting equipment, remove the memory device(s) and place them in the respective orange bags.
11. Complete the card inside the orange bag and record the seal number to be used to seal the bag.

12. Seal the orange bag including all memory devices from all machines.
13. Deliver all materials to the municipal clerk's office.

APPENDIX I - SUPPLIES

The following supplies will be provided for each election to the Board of Absentee Ballot Canvassers:

- Two (2) duplicate copies for each Ward of the absentee log printed from the WisVote System
- Sufficient large ballot envelopes/bags/containers prepared with Chain of Custody and Certificate signed by the Board
- Sufficient Inspectors' Statements (EL-104) (a single Inspectors' Statement must be maintained for each ward)
- Sufficient Incident Logs (to be attached to EL-104 forms)
- Sufficient large envelopes for Used Certificate Envelopes (EL-103)
- Sufficient large envelopes for Rejected Absentee Ballot Envelopes (EL-102)
- Sufficient large envelopes labeled for Remade/Reconstructed ballots
- Sufficient write-in tally forms (a single tally sheet must be maintained for each ward)
- Voter number sheets
- Election Day Manual for reference
- Red pens for marking absentee ballot logs
- Ballots for remaking voted ballots if necessary
- Black pens for marking ballots
- Challenge documentation for reference

Completing and Delivering Forms

Municipalities utilizing an optical scan voting system shall use two machine printouts as tally sheets. However, write-in votes must be recorded on duplicate original Write-in forms (EL-105), which are signed by the Board of Absentee Ballot Canvassers. The ballots and materials shall be delivered to the municipal clerk who, in turn, delivers them to the County Clerk with all other materials and ballots, and after completing, recording and securing the required forms. As at the polls, all ballots must be secured in a ballot bag with the signatures of the Municipal Board of Absentee Ballot Canvassers.