

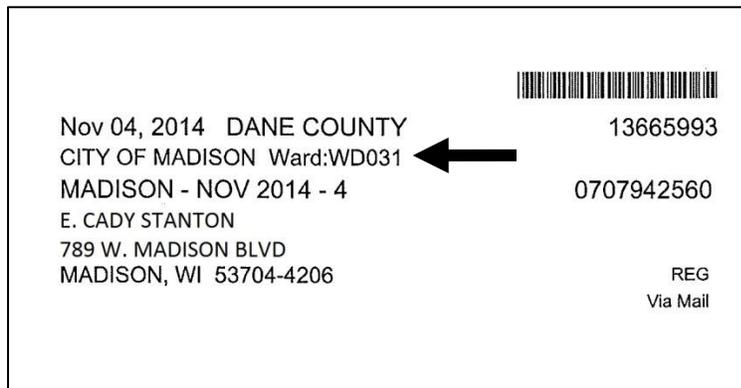
Quick Guide to Processing Absentee Ballots

Revised 3/2023

- Two officials should be involved any time we are dealing with voted ballots.
- When breaking the seal on a package of absentee envelopes, document the seal number and the time on the Absentee Diary of Events.

1. Sort absentee envelopes

- Check the ward number** to verify the ballots are at the correct polling place. If a ballot was delivered to the wrong polling place, record this on your Absentee Diary of Events and call the Clerk's Office at 266-4220. The label on each absentee certificate identifies the ward number.



- Make sure certificate envelopes are sealed with no evidence of tampering.** If an envelope is unsealed or it is evident that the envelope had tampered with, the absentee ballot must be rejected. Do not assign a voter slip number. Do not open the envelope. Set aside the envelope for rejection.
 - ✓ *The presence of Scotch tape across the envelope flap is not necessarily evidence of tampering. Some voters tape envelopes closed before placing them in the mail, and that is okay.*
 - ✓ *Sometimes the adhesive on the envelope flap does not stay completely sealed from corner to corner as the envelope travels through the mail. In these cases, officials must evaluate whether it appears there was any tampering, or it was possible to remove and reinsert the ballot.*

- **Check certificates for voter and witness signatures.** Each certificate must have the signature (or mark) of the voter and the voter's witness. If either of these signatures is missing, the absentee ballot must be rejected. Do not assign a voter slip number. Do not open the envelope. Set envelope aside for rejection.
 - ✓ *Signatures do not need to be legible.*
- **Check certificates for witness addresses.** Each certificate must have the address of the voter's witness. The Wisconsin Elections Commission has defined a complete address as a street number, street name, and municipality. If the witness address is missing or incomplete, the absentee ballot must be rejected. Do not assign a voter slip number. Do not open the envelope. Set envelope aside for rejection.
 - ✓ *A witness address that provides the name of a residence hall and a room number in lieu of a street address is also a complete address.*
 - ✓ *A witness address that provides a zip code in lieu of the name of the municipality is a complete address because the municipality can be determined by the zip code.*
 - ✓ *A witness address that provides the name of the county and a zip code in lieu of the name of the municipality is a complete address.*
- **Check names against ineligible list.** Contact the Chief Inspector if an absentee ballot was submitted by someone on the ineligible list for your ward.

2. Check absentees into the poll book

- **Taking at least three absentee certificates at a time,** stand in line to check the absentee voters into the poll book.
- **Announce each absentee voter's name and address at the poll book.** Observers must be able to hear the names and addresses.
 - If absentee voter is not found on poll book, check the supplemental poll list. The voter had to be registered in order for the Clerk's Office to generate the absentee label. If a voter's name cannot be found on the poll book, call the Clerk's Office to check on the status of the voter's registration (266-4220).

- Absentee voter receives next sequential voter slip for that ward.** The workers at the poll book table will document the voter slip number in the poll book, followed by the letter A. Write the voter slip number in the upper right corner of the absentee certificate, too. This helps with reconciliation if your numbers do not balance at the end of the night.

3. Open certificate envelopes

- Carefully open certificate envelope.** If the ballot is torn, it will need to be set aside to remake with Good Ballot/Bad Ballot stickers.
- Remove ballot from certificate envelope.** Be sure to protect the secrecy of the ballot. Once the ballot is out of the envelope, there should be no way to associate the voter's name with the ballot.
 - If envelope contains more than one marked ballot, both ballots must be rejected. Using tape, reseal ballots in the certificate envelope. Set aside the certificate envelope for rejection. Document on the Absentee Diary of Events that you will have issued one more voter slip than ballots counted.
 - If envelope contains more than one ballot but only one ballot is marked, process the marked ballot and seal the unmarked ballot back in the certificate envelope.
- Put empty certificate envelopes in large white "Used Certificate" envelope.**

4. Unfold, flatten, and examine ballots

- Completely remove absentee ballots from opened certificate envelopes.** You should not be able to associate a voter name or number with any ballot. Unfold at least three ballots at a time to protect the secrecy of each ballot.
- Flatten ballots as much as possible.**
- Check ballots for initials.** Check for the Clerk's initials or Special Voting Deputy initials under "Absent Elector's Ballot Issued by." If the initials are missing, make a note on the Absentee Diary of Events, e.g., "Absentee ballot

missing Clerk's initials. Processed ballot." You should not know the name of the voter or the voter slip number.

- ❑ **Watch for absentee ballots marked with green or red pens.** The tabulator may not read these ballots correctly. If a ballot is marked with a green or red pen, set it aside to remake with Good Ballot/Bad Ballot stickers. You should not know the name of the voter or the voter slip number.
- ❑ **Watch for creatively marked ballots.** If the voter circled, underlined, crossed out, or erased marks on the ballot, set it aside to remake with Good Ballot/Bad Ballot stickers. You should not know the name of the voter or the voter slip number.
- ❑ **Watch for over-voted ballots.** If the voter selected too many candidates for one office, set ballot aside to remake with Good Ballot/Bad Ballot stickers. You should not know the name of the voter or the voter slip number.

5. Insert absentee ballots into tabulator. If an absentee voter did not select any candidates on the ballot, the tabulator will warn you that the ballot is blank. If the ballot really is blank, use the touchscreen to verify that you want to "cast blank ballot." Document this on the incident log. If the tabulator kicks out a ballot for another reason, set the ballot aside to remake with Good Ballot/Bad Ballot stickers. Remember that absentee ballots are not rejected once they are out of the envelope; only certificate envelopes are rejected.

Voters at the polling place could jump to the conclusion that you are personally casting three ballots. For greater transparency, wear a name badge that you are processing absentees).

