

Election Observer Training



October 10, 2024

Mason County Auditor's Office

Elections Department – Vote Center

Steve Duenkel, Mason County Auditor

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Election Observers

Mason County Election staff administer elections with integrity. The staff has value and takes pride in every election.

Observers affirm the integrity of the election by impartially observing various elements of the election, including ballot processing activities.

As an Election Observer, you want to understand the process and rules prior to observing an election. This training will cover:

- Ways you can observe
- The process of conducting an election
- The rules for observers

Two Ways to Observe

Livestream:

The Ballot Processing Room and Ballot Drop Boxes have security cameras that are livestreamed 24/7 during the voting period.

The video feeds are available at masoncountywaelections.gov

In Person:

Political parties may designate observers to be in the ballot processing room during all phases of the election. We welcome interested citizens as well. Our space is limited to 6 observers (up to 3 from each party with consideration of citizens).

Ballot drop boxes can be observed in person. We suggest you call in advance to find out when (approximately) we will be at the ballot box that you would like to observe.

Observing Ballot Processing In Person

Observing in person, you must sign in at the kiosk before you can enter the ballot processing room.



All observers must be identified by a badge with your name and party representation. Other citizens will sign in as a visitor.

You will receive your badge once inside the Ballot Processing Room. When you leave, please sign out at the kiosk. (This is important in the event of an evacuation or an emergency.)



Upon entering the Ballot Processing Room, you must place your smart devices (cell phone, watch, etc.) in a faraday pouch and place in a locker with any personal items.

Election Activities

We are here to help you understand the process of conducting an election, including the testing conducted and the laws and rules that we follow and to protect the integrity of elections.

- **Logic and Accuracy Test**
- **Security of Ballots and Equipment**
- **Processing Ballots**
 - Ballot Collection
 - Sorting and Signature Verification
 - Opening the Ballots
 - Inspection of Ballots
 - Ballot Duplication
 - Scanning Ballots
 - Resolution of Votes
 - Tabulation
- **Auditing the Results**
 - Random Audit
 - Risk Limiting Audit (RLA)
 - Review Anomalies
- **Reconciliation**
- **Canvass of Rejected Ballots**
- **Certification of the Results**

Logic and Accuracy Testing

Before ballots can be scanned, the tabulation system must be tested to ensure that it will correctly count votes for all candidates and/or measures on the ballot.

The election staff creates a matrix with predetermined results of votes of every race/measure on the ballot.

- Every ballot style, includes ballots from all printing sources (vendor, AVU, VoteWA.gov, and from our in-house printer)
- All responses for all candidates/measures
- Overvotes (voter marks more than one)
- Undervotes (voter makes no vote)
- Write-in votes
- Blank ballot (an unvoted ballot)
- Results on the Secretary of State's election webpage is posting accurately

The Official Logic and Accuracy Test is conducted for each election. The Secretary of State's office attends and certifies the testing on all State and Federal elections.

Security of Ballots and Equipment

Voted ballots, electronic images of voted ballots and tabulation equipment are required to be kept in secure storage. Secure storage is a container or room that is locked, sealed, logged and accessed in the presence of two election staff throughout the election.

Sealing requires the use of uniquely numbered seals written on seal logs, verified and signed/initialed by two election staff. When opening, the seal must be verified against the seal log to detect any unauthorized access.

All transportation containers are required to be closed with a seal that is logged in duplicate by the two staff. One copy goes in the transport container prior to sealing, the other copy is kept with the staff until opened at the counting center.

Scanned ballots are sealed in boxes or envelopes with tamper proof tape and numbered seal stickers and logged by two election staff, then stored in a locked and sealed room through certification of the election.

RCW 29A.60.110, 120

WAC 434-261-045, 130

WAC 434-250-110

Cyber Security

In 2016, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) designated Elections a **Critical Infrastructure**. This has brought additional resources and assistance into the protection and security of elections. We continually work with the Secretary of State's office, and our county's IT department to increase the security of Mason County's elections.

As part of our required ongoing training and certification, our office has participated in numerous Cyber Security trainings including a National Election Cyber Drill, run by the Department of Homeland Security.

The ballot tabulation system **is not** connected to the internet and is located in a secured room that must be opened by two election staff members. The results are printed, then downloaded onto a cleaned flash drive, that is provided by the Secretary of State, and they are only used once to protect the tabulation system from malware. We take steps to protect tabulation equipment and election servers from electromagnetic interference and have monitors to identify wireless signal sources.

Ballot Processing Room Emergency Procedure

As observers in the Ballot Processing Room, we must ensure the safety of all individuals while safeguarding the integrity of the ballots.

The procedures below will be executed by staff for any **unknown substance** or **objects** found and must be followed for Ballot Processing Room observation.

Ballot Processing Room Procedure -

1. All operations will **stop immediately** – Marie, Mike, or Susie will be contacted by staff.
 2. All individuals in the Ballot Processing Room must exit through the backdoor and go to the right and stand by the window (Staff will bring the decontamination supplies outside). Leave all personal items.
 3. All contaminated individuals will use the decontamination supplies provided by staff to clean any personal contact, and contaminated clothing will be isolated.
- Marie, Mike, or Susie will quickly isolate the area and call 911, and join the team outside.
 - No one may re-enter the contaminated room.

Ballot Drop Box Emergency Procedure

As observers of Ballot Drop Box Collection, we must ensure the safety of all individuals while safeguarding the integrity of the ballots.

The procedures below will be executed by staff for any **unknown substance** or **objects** found and must be followed during Ballot Drop Box Collection observation.

Ballot Drop Box Collection Procedure -

1. All operations will **stop immediately** – Marie, Mike, or Susie will be contacted by staff.
2. All individuals near the Ballot Drop Box – must **relocate** at least **25ft away**.
3. If safe to do so the Ballot Drop Box will be covered with a tarp by staff to contain spreading of substances.
4. All contaminated individuals will use the decontamination supplies provided by staff to clean any personal contact, and contaminated clothing will be isolated.
5. The 25 ft area will be restricted until emergency services arrive and provide further instructions.

Processing Ballots

Ballot Collection

Ballots are collected from the Shelton Post Office and Ballot Drop Boxes and brought to the Ballot Processing Room by two election staff.

Sorting Ballots

The ballot envelopes received are counted by the sorter machine by location.

The sorter captures the image of the front and back of each envelope.

The sorter detects and reads the Ballot ID barcode to link it to the voters' data in the VoteWA registration system to conduct signature verification.

Processing Ballots

Signature Verification

In our vote by mail system, signatures are the only way to validate identification of the voter submitting a ballot. The signature on the return oath envelope is compared to the signature in the voter's record.

All signature verification staff must complete a signature verification training taught by a Washington Secretary of State or approved trainer. Ballots are challenged if there is no signature, or the signature does not match the signature on the voter's record.

New: Second review of mismatched signatures is conducted by certified election staff to determine if the challenge is necessary.

A letter is sent to voters whose ballot is challenged, giving them an opportunity to cure their ballot and have it counted.

We also follow-up by telephone and/or email. Challenged ballots must be cured no later than 4:00pm the day before certification of the election.

New: Random Compliance check is conducted with the Secretary of State after election day.

RCW 29A.40.110

WAC 434-250-110

WAC 434-261-052

Processing Ballots

Opening the Ballots

During opening, the Oath envelopes are placed voter information side down on the table to maintain voter secrecy.

Election staff hand count the envelopes to verify that the number of ballot envelopes indicated on the group tag is what is to be opened.

The ballots with the sleeve are removed from the return envelope and verified that there is only one ballot per envelope.

Prior to removing the ballots from the secrecy sleeves, the ballots are shuffled to further maintain voter secrecy.

Then, the ballots are removed from their secrecy sleeves.

Processing Ballots

Inspection of Ballots

Ballots are inspected for marks that the tabulation system may not read properly and damaged ballots. These ballots are set aside for further review before scanning and are handled individually to ensure that the voter's intent is accurately captured.

Ballots without issues are scanned and processed normally.

Legislative District 35
State Representative Position 1

Dan Griffey
(Prefers Republican Party)

~~James Thomas~~
(Prefers Democratic Party)

Legislative District 35
State Representative Position 2

David Daggett *← David*
(Prefers Democratic Party)

Drew C. MacEwen
(Prefers Republican Party)

Inspectors pull ballots for careful resolution that may have:

Vote corrections where the voter did not make another choice

Voting marks outside the oval.

Processing Ballots

Ballot Duplication

Ballots that cannot be scanned are duplicated onto a new ballot. The ballots may not be scannable because they are torn or soiled, taped or printed as such that cannot be scanned or any other reason that the scanner will not accept it.

Ballots that can be scanned but the votes cannot be detected properly (ballots printed from VoteWA.gov or printed in smaller text or other reasons).

“Ballot duplication” is a true copy of valid votes.

All ballots that require duplication are logged and tracked with a unique control number.

Duplication requires a team of two and then audited by an additional team of two election staff.

Processing Ballots

Scanning Ballots

Ballots are scanned into the tabulation system and the images are stored.

Resolution of Votes

The ballot tally system, Clear Ballot reviews marks in each of the target areas. Resolution is the process of reviewing marks and ensuring they record correctly. This requires two certified election staff.

Example: A voter makes a correction and selects another choice; the system records it as an overvote. The staff must adjudicate the selection to reflect the intended vote.

RCW 29A.60.125

WAC 434-261-102

Tabulation

All ballots have been accepted at signature verifications are scanned into the system.

Votes cannot be tabulated nor can results be displayed or released until after 8:00pm

Election day.

RCW 29A.40.110

WAC 434-250-110

Auditing the Results

We encourage participation from the parties in the audit process. Participation of representatives from each of the two major political parties is required or the election staff will conduct the audit(s) solely.

Random Audit

Random Audits are conducted within 48 hours after the election. A race and 6 scan batches are selected by the parties or randomly by the election staff to hand count the votes to be compared to the tabulation system results.

Risk Limiting Audit (RLA)

RLA randomly selects ballots to compare to the tabulation system by a random seed pulled by the Secretary of State's Office staff.

Review of Anomalies

Review of ballot vote anomalies is done by reviewing the target areas of votes on the ballot in the tabulation system. This review is looking for oddities that the election staff at opening and inspecting of ballots may have missed.

RCW 29A.60.170, 185

WAC 434-261-108, 110, 115-118

Reconciliation

The number of ballots received, challenged and accepted are reconciled daily to maintain accuracy and accountability.

Every ballot received, tabulated (counted), and rejected are accounted for prior to every election certification.

The Secretary of State's Office requires counties to complete a reconciliation form that they provide and must be published on our website after certification of the election.

The information on the reconciliation form is the final count of ballots received, counted, rejected and all other ballots not listed (forwarded ballots, ballots received to late, no longer a voter, etc.).

RCW 29A.60.235

WAC 434-262-050, 060, 070

Reconciliation Form

Mason County Auditor

Reconciliation Form

General information		Registered voters eligible to participate	
County name	Mason	Active registered voters	3,685
Election date	4/26/2022	Inactive registered voters	349

Category Reconciliation (detailed accounting of ballots)

	Issued (number of voters issued ballots)	Credited voters in VoteWA (envelopes containing ballots)	Ballots Accepted (Counted / Tabulated)	Ballots not counted		Discrepancy (If zero, category balances)
				Ballots forwarded to other counties	Ballots Rejected	
UOCAVA	33	1	1	N/A	0	0
Federal write-in	N/A	0	0	N/A	0	0
Provisional	0	0	0	0	0	0
DREs	0	0	0	N/A	0	0
All voters not reported in above categories	3,644	1,459	1,425	1	33	0
Total for all voter categories	3,677	1,460	1,426	1	33	0

Summary

Reconciliation

Overall Ballot Reconciliation

Ballots Received	1,460
Ballots Accepted	1,426
Ballots Not Counted	34
Discrepancy	0

Voters credited to ballots counted

Credited voters in VoteWA	1,426
Credited envelopes without ballots	0
Voters not credited in VoteWA (examples: FWAB or ACP)	0
Total valid ballots	1,426
Discrepancy	0

Additional Information

Replacement Ballots

Requested	8
Issued	6
Returned	3
Counted	3
Rejected	0

Return method

Email	0
Fax	0
Deposited at staffed, unstaffed deposit sites and voting centers	636
Non-UOCAVA returned by Fax or Email	0

Generation method

VoteWA	1
Other online programs	0
PDF originating from county	0
Non-UOCAVA ballots issued electronically	1

AVU

Estimated number of paper ballots printed by AVU	1
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Category discrepancy explanation

VoteWA discrepancy explanation

Report prepared by: Marie Stevenson

Date: May 6, 2022

Contact number: (360) 427-9670 ext. 469

Canvass of Rejected Ballots

The County Canvassing Board delegates the election staff to process ballots and conduct the election.

Ballots can only be rejected by the Canvassing Board.

The election staff refers all rejected ballots to the Canvassing Board for review that includes, but is not limited to:

- Unsigned ballot envelopes
- Signature on the envelope does not match the signature in the voters' registration file
- Empty envelopes
- Ballots received too late
- No ID of voter
- Questionable ballots (voter intent questioned)

The Canvassing Board members individually review each ballot envelope and ballot presented to make the determination of if the ballot is to be counted or not. Rejecting or accepting a ballot requires a minimum of 2 votes from the 3 Canvassing Board members.

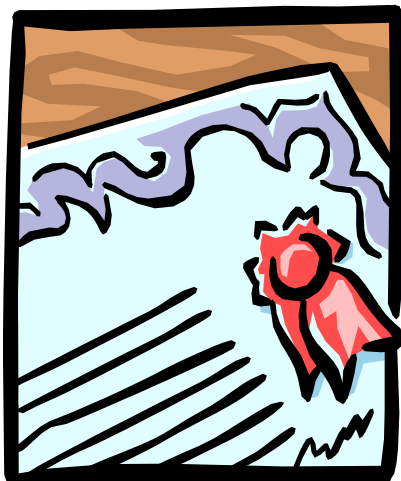
RCW 29A.40.110, 60.040, 60.050, 60.140, 60.190, 60.221

**WAC 434-260-010, 261-120, 261-050, 261-086, 250-110, 250-120,
262-013, 262-015, 262-031**

Certification of Results

The County Canvassing Board consists of the County Auditor, Chair of the County legislative authority, and Prosecuting Attorney (or designee). The Board reviews and certifies the results 10 days after Special Elections and the Presidential Primary, 14 days after the Primary Election, and 21 days after the General Election.

Upon the Certification, the election results become official. All ballots and signature cures must be received no later than the day before certification.



RCW 29A.60.140, 190

WAC 434-262-070

Election Observers

Observers Must Not

- Touch ballots, ballot containers or equipment
- Disrupt or interfere with the process
- Distract the staff – limit conversations
- Discuss political issues while observing
- Advocate for or against any candidate or measure in any way (wear clothing, buttons, etc.)
- Promote political preference in any way.
- Use a cell phone or any other recording type device in the ballot processing room.
- Make record of or discuss any information regarding voters or votes cast on any ballot.
- Have possession of any type of weapon while in the Ballot Processing Room.

Observers must abide by the Observer Rules that are provided and posted in the ballot processing room.

Schedule

Ballot processing begins the following Monday after ballots are mailed to voters. Processing times can vary based on the number of ballots received and may not occur every day.

Information and important dates can be found on the Mason County Elections website.

masoncountywaelections.gov

For more detailed information please contact our office.

elections@masoncountywa.gov

(360) 427-9670 ext. 470

The ballot processing center has limited space. Each party can schedule up to 3 observers at a time throughout the day.

Be mindful that we would also like to accommodate anyone who may want to observe who is not affiliated with a party.

... observation of the process and procedures helps ensure the integrity of our elections and engages citizens in the election process....

Questions/Comments

Observer Rules for Election Processes

General Rules for All Observers

(Applicable to both Ballot Processing and Ballot Collection)

- 1. Check-In:**
 - Check in at the kiosk and wear the provided badge at all times.
 - Identify yourself to staff for security purposes.
 - 2. Electronics & Personal Items:**
 - Place all electronic devices in the provided Faraday pouch.
 - Secure personal items (coats, backpacks, purses, etc.) in a designated locker.
 - Weapons of any type are prohibited in the building.
 - 3. Behavior:**
 - Do not disrupt or interfere with any process.
 - Maintain at least an arm's length from staff.
 - Do not speak to staff handling or processing ballots. All questions must be directed to Steve, Marie, Susan, Michael (full time election staff).
 - 4. Prohibited Actions:**
 - No touching of any machinery, equipment, supplies, ballots, or ballot containers.
 - No electioneering paraphernalia (campaign/political promotional clothing, buttons, or other).
 - No recording or discussing voter or ballot information.
 - 5. Communication:**
 - Report any suspicious activity immediately to Steve, Marie, Susan or Michael.
 - Follow all requests from Steve, Marie, Susan, Michael (full time election staff).
 - 6. Violation of Rules:**
 - Violators may be asked to leave the facility immediately.
 - The Elections Department reserves the right to remove observers at any time.
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Rules for Observing Ballot Processing

- 1. Room Capacity:**
 - The processing room can accommodate up to six observers, including representatives from each major political party and interested citizens.
 - 2. Scheduling:**
 - Submit names and scheduled hours of observers at least one day in advance via email.
 - Ballot processing schedule is subject to change daily or can occur outside of regular hours.
 - 3. Behavior in the Processing Room:**
 - Limit conversations and discussions while in the room.
 - Food and beverages are allowed only if they are small, non-messy, and in a closed-lid container, kept away from work areas.
 - 4. Observer Proximity:**
 - Maintain an arm's length distance from election staff.
 - Do not obstruct paths or interfere with the workflow.
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Rules for Observing Ballot Collection

- 1. Behavior at Ballot Drop Boxes:**
 - Keep a respectful distance to allow collection staff to feel comfortable.
 - Do not touch ballot boxes, supplies, or ballots.
 - Identify/introduce yourself to the staff as an observer for security/safety purposes.
- 2. Driving and Safety:**
 - Drive safely and follow all traffic laws when observing ballot collection at various locations.
 - Do not obstruct paths or impede staff from collecting ballots.
- 3. Timing:**
 - Election staff will not wait for observers to arrive to begin ballot collection.