

7 ABSENTEE BALLOTS

7.1. General Provisions.

- a. Absentee Ballot Status. Absentee ballots shall be handled, processed and tabulated in a manner as to provide essentially the same security and integrity afforded ballots cast at the polls. Therefore, except as provided in this chapter or otherwise required by law, policies and procedures governing poll ballots shall also apply to absentee ballots.
- b. Processing of Absentee Ballots. All absentee ballots received shall be sent to the mail ballot processing site (MBOS) for processing. The initial processing of absentee ballot which includes signature and postmark verification and crediting of the vote shall be performed by delegates of the Canvassing Board and assigned staff, and shall commence no sooner than ten days prior to the election. (WAC 434-240-230 through- 434-240-300).
- c. Opening of Absentee Ballots. Ballots shall not be removed from the outer envelopes until after verification and validation are completed and in any event not until after the Board has been convened. The opening of the inner security envelope and the extraction of the absentee ballot shall take place only in the presence of political party observers, after which the ballots will be locked and sealed until they are tabulated. (RCW 29.36.060). *(See also Chapter 4.)*
- d. Setting of Vote Tallying Devices- Rejected Ballots. The vote tallying devices used to tally mailed ballots shall be set to rejected all over-voted and blank ballots. All rejected ballots shall; be outstacked for additional manual inspection. The reinspection shall be conducted in the same manner as the initial inspection (see Section 4.7) with special attention being given to stray marks, erasures, and other conditions that may have caused to vote tallying devices to misread and reject the ballot.

7.2. Review of Returned Ballot Envelopes.

- a. Examination. Delegates shall examine the postmark, statement, and signature on each absentee ballot return envelope containing a ballot.
 - i. Postmark must be legible and not later than the day of election. (WAC 434-240-240).
 - ii. Signatures must be on the appropriate place on the envelope following the affidavit of absentee ballot applicant. (WAC 434-240-240).
- b. Comparison of Signatures. The delegates of the Board shall then verify that the voter's signature is the same as that on the original application or registration card or exact facsimile thereof of that voter. (RCW 29.36.060)