



# Wisconsin Elections Commission

201 West Washington Avenue | Second Floor | P.O. Box 7984 | Madison, WI 53707-7984  
(608) 266-8005 | elections@wi.gov | elections.wi.gov

---

**DATE:** September 10, 2024

**TO:** Wisconsin Municipal Clerks  
Wisconsin County Clerks  
City of Milwaukee Election Commission  
Milwaukee County Elections Commission

**FROM:** WEC Staff

**SUBJECT:** Absentee Ballot Mailing Best Practices

## 1. Summary.

This memo provides essential reminders and best practices for managing and tracking absentee ballots in preparation for the upcoming election. These guidelines are intended to assist clerks in their duties and enhance coordination between election officials and USPS to ensure the smooth processing of absentee ballots.

## 2. Reminders and Recommendations.

**Clerk Responsibilities.** Clerks have key responsibilities for absentee ballots, including processing requests within one business day and updating WisVote with issuance and return details within 48 hours. While deadlines are tight, accuracy is crucial, as many mailing issues arise from incorrect transposing of addresses, impacting successful ballot delivery.

Outgoing absentee ballot envelopes must include turn postage for voters within the U.S., and the clerk's return address should be clearly printed on each envelope to avoid delivery issues.

**Pre-Mailing Checks.** Before sending out absentee ballots, clerks should complete a series of checks. This includes ensuring that the absentee ballot materials are accurate, properly assembled, and mailed with all necessary information.

Clerks should:

- Review the ineligible voter list
- Assemble all necessary materials
- Validate addresses for accuracy
- Verify that the correct postage is applied
- Ensure that the clerk's initials are on all relevant documents

*Wisconsin Elections Commissioners*

Ann S. Jacobs, chair | Marge Bostelmann | Don M. Millis | Carrie Riepl | Robert Spindell | Mark L. Thomsen

---

Administrator  
Meagan Wolfe

In addition to these steps, clerk should follow a detailed checklist to avoid common mailing errors that could delay delivery:

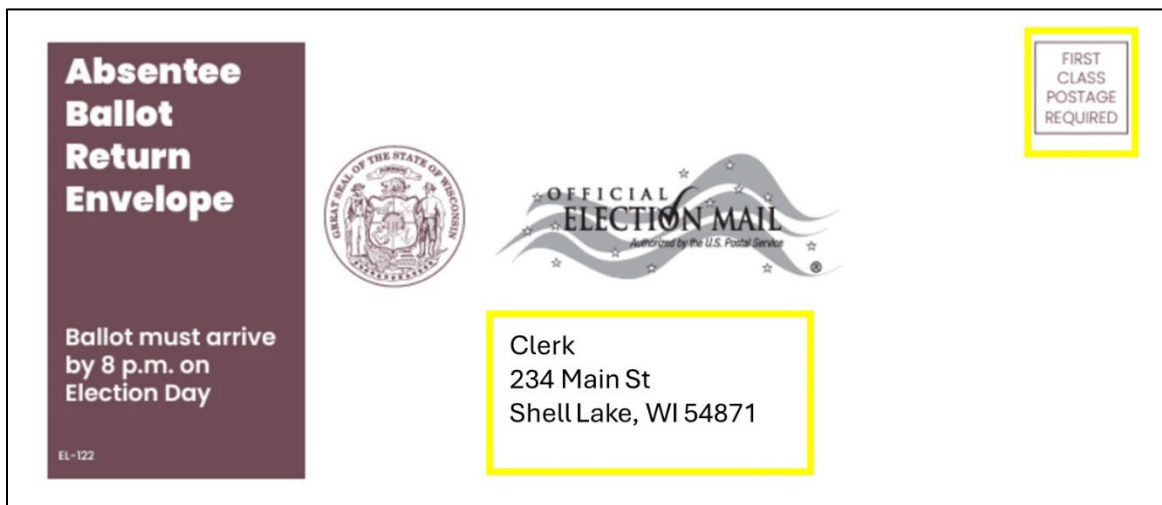
**For the Outer Carrier Envelope:**

- Ensure the voter's name and address are correctly placed in the designated fields.
- Verify that the clerk's return address is accurate and in the correct field.
- Check that the correct postage is applied.
- Ensure all labels and writing are legible, without smudging or faint printing.
- Confirm the envelope is sealed securely to prevent tampering or damage during delivery.



**For the Return Envelope:**

- Confirm the voter's name and address are in the correct fields.
- Verify the clerk's return address is correctly placed.
- Ensure return postage is applied properly.
- Double-check that all labels and writing are legible, and that the print is not smudged or too light.



***Reminder: EL-120 and EL-122 are state templates, prescribed by unanimous vote of the Commission in accordance with state statute, for mandatory use in Wisconsin absentee voting processes. The Commission authorizes no changes to the forms, other than those associated with the varied postage practices of local election officials.***

**Consequences of Incorrect Mailing Information:** Failing to follow the above checklist can result in several problems that may delay or prevent absentee ballots from being counted. Below are the main consequences of errors in mailing information:

**No return address:** If the clerk's return address is missing or incorrectly placed on the return envelope, the ballot may not make it back to the correct clerk. This can result in the ballot arriving too late to be counted or being misdelivered. Without a return address, the ballot might also be sent back to the voter, who could then miss the submission deadline.

**Misplaced address fields:** If the voter's name and address or the clerk's return address are incorrectly placed on the envelope, the ballot may be routed to the wrong jurisdiction or returned to the wrong clerk. This can lead to significant delays in delivery, risking the ballot not being counted by the election deadline.

**Postage Issues:** If the correct postage is not applied to either the outer carrier or the return envelope, the ballot may be returned to the sender. In the case of outgoing ballots, this means the voter may not receive their ballot on time, and in the case of the return envelope, the completed ballot may not be returned to the clerk in time to be counted.

These mistakes can disrupt the absentee voting process, potentially disenfranchising voters and undermining confidence in the voting system. By utilizing the steps addresses above, clerks can help ensure that ballots are properly processed and delivered on time.

**Handling Delivery Problems.** Clerks should be aware of common delivery issues reported by USPS and voters. These issues include illegible mailing labels due to low ink on EL-120 forms, missing clerk addresses on return envelopes (EL-122), failure to apply postage on EL-120 forms, and address typos such as the swapping of residential and mailing municipalities. Please ensure that all printed labels are clearly legible and that all return envelopes contain your return address in order to ensure timely return.

The USPS will make every effort to deliver ballots, but in cases where delivery is not possible, they may return the ballot to the sender or deliver it to the mailing address municipality or the closest municipality. If ballots are returned to a clerk but do not belong to your jurisdiction, they should contact the relevant local election officials, including county or municipal clerks, or the WEC for assistance in redirecting the ballots to the correct clerk.

**Stay up to date with USPS.** It is recommended clerks work with your local postmasters to ensure they have basic information, like primary and back-up clerk contact information, the number of

ballots in the initial mail drop, and the best method of ballot return postage. Reach out to your local postmasters about expected procedures for handling ballots arriving on and around Election Day, where ballots should be delivered on Election Day, and to plan on how to get those ballots to where they need to be counted on Election Day.

Regular USPS meetings are held monthly between WEC staff and USPS staff. In these meetings USPS is available for questions and concerns regarding election mail, and provide updates as needed.

**USPS Resources:** These USPS links provide further information and resources about election mail generally.

- a) USPS Election Mail Resources (<https://about.usps.com/election-mail/election-mail-resources.htm>)
- b) Official Election Mail Program Kit (<http://about.usps.com/kits/kit600.pdf>)
- c) Graphic Guidelines and Logos (<http://about.usps.com/publications/pub631.pdf>)
- d) State and Local Election Mail User's Guide (<http://about.usps.com/publications/pub632.pdf>)

**3. Questions.** Call the WEC Help Desk at 608-261-2028 or e-mail [elections@wi.gov](mailto:elections@wi.gov).