



Wisconsin Elections Commission

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DATE: October 18, 2024

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

FROM: WEC Staff

SUBJECT: 2024 Mail Handling & Absentee Ballot Envelope Best Practices

1. Purpose.

The memo consolidates previously published information about recommended mail handling procedures to protect against hazardous materials. The recommendations published here also apply to the handling of absentee ballot envelopes, both before and on Election Day.

2. Background. Over the past two decades, federal, state, and county government offices and employees have been the target of multiple incidents using letters containing suspicious materials, including letters mailed to election offices in 2023 and 2024. While most of these incidents did not contain hazardous materials, some did, and election officials should be alert to the possibility. Note that there are no credible threats that anyone intends to mail hazardous material to Wisconsin election officials. The information in this memo is provided purely to ensure election officials are aware of the latest recommendations from state and federal agencies.

3. Recommendations. The following recommendations are provided to maintain accuracy, security, and compliance with election laws:

- a. **Contingency Plans for Offices and Polling Places.** Election officials at all levels of government should maintain contingency plans to prepare for any incident that could render an office or polling place inoperative. In many cases, the fundamental steps in a crisis remain the same, regardless of the nature of the hazard. For example, the procedures to respond to suspected hazardous material are not unlike the procedures that would be followed in the event of a fire. The WEC publishes templates and additional recommendations for contingency planning on ElectEd under the title “Emergency Preparedness Materials.” **View the materials at <https://electiontraining.wi.gov>**
- b. **Review Mail Handling Best Practices.** Earlier this year, several federal agencies published recommended procedures for mail handling. Essential elements of this guidance, which also applies to absentee ballot envelopes, include:
 - Preparing to handle mail (location, protective equipment, other supplies)
 - Identifying suspicious mail
 - Responding to possible exposure

Wisconsin Elections Commissioners

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The complete guidance document is attached to this memorandum.

- c. **Coordination with First Responders.** Most emergency situations will initially involve local police or fire departments. For example, firefighters are trained to respond to hazardous materials and can request special hazardous materials teams if needed. Local election officials are encouraged to meet with first responders and review contingency plans before an emergency occurs.
 - d. **Know Your Emergency Contacts.** Election officials can always contact the WEC with questions or concerns, since the agency coordinates closely with state and federal partners including Wisconsin Emergency Management, Wisconsin Department of Justice, Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Wisconsin National Guard, FBI, DHS, CISA, USPIS, and others. If there is an imminent threat to life, call 911 before calling any other resource. A list of elections contacts, including after-hours support, is attached to this memorandum.
4. **Questions.** Call the WEC Help Desk at 608-261-2028 or e-mail elections@wi.gov.

Enclosures:

- Federal Joint Agency Publication: Election Mail Handling Procedures to Protect Against Hazardous Materials
- WEC Publication: State Contacts