



Wisconsin Elections Commission

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DATE: March 18, 2020

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

FROM: Meagan Wolfe
Administrator

SUBJECT: FAQ: Absentee Envelope Issues and Options

The Wisconsin Elections Commission (WEC) has received numerous questions regarding absentee ballot envelopes, potential shortages and what procedures can be used if clerks are running low on envelopes. We also understand that printing vendors around the state have exhausted their stock of envelopes and have cited delays in the paper supply chain. The WEC is currently looking for options to find additional stock at that clerks can use, in the meantime, we know there are some jurisdictions who are reaching the end of their current stock. Below please find guidance on options that may be available to you to modify the types of envelopes you are using so that you are able to fulfill requests timely.

We should also note that at this time we have not heard from any clerks that are concerned about a ballot shortage either for absentee or election day. If you are concerned about a ballot shortage, please let your county clerk and the WEC know immediately.

We understand that you are currently seeing an unprecedented number of absentee requests and that rate is expected to continue ahead of election day. Thank you for all of your patience and hard work during these complicated times.

1. I am running out of absentee envelopes, what do I do?

Clerks should work with their usual or local printers first to see what stock is available. The Wisconsin Elections Commission is looking into options for a large envelope printing that would be made available to municipalities; however, turnaround time may take up to a week. Municipal clerks should contact the WEC or their county clerk if they expect envelope shortages. If acquiring additional envelopes in the format you normally use is not a possibility, clerks should find an alternate envelope for sending the ballot, such as using standard blank envelopes and discontinuing sending pre-printed envelopes. If clerks cannot acquire their usual envelopes (size, type, security envelopes), alternate envelopes may be used instead.

2. Does the pre-printed absentee ballot return envelope need to be a security envelope?

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No, there is no requirement that the clerk must provide a pre-printed security envelope for voters to return their ballot. A security envelope may be preferred by both the clerk and voter, so check with your printer to see what stock is available. If security envelopes are not available, other windowless options are allowed.

3. Are there other methods of transmitting ballots to voters that do not require envelopes?

Yes, clerks have the option to send voters their absentee ballots via email. To do this, you will need to scan an initialed ballot to send to the voter and include an [absentee ballot certificate \(EL-122\)](#) and the [uniform absentee ballot instructions](#). You can also generate an EL-122 in WisVote with the voter information pre-filled that can be emailed to the voter. If you do not have a scanner, please contact your county clerk or the WEC for support. The voter must still return their voted ballot by mail, and the ballot must be received by 8 p.m. on Election Day for it to be counted. You can read the full instructions for clerks on emailing ballots [here](#): <https://elections.wi.gov/publications/other/faxing-emailing-absentee-ballots>.

4. What other envelope options exist outside of the regular size and pre-printing options?

You may use any standard envelope to send the absentee ballot to the voter. You may also include any size envelope for the voter to return their ballot. Each envelope should be large enough to accommodate the ballot and any included materials.

The mailing envelopes do not have to be pre-printed with the election mail logo and ballot return envelopes are not required to have the pre-printed certificate (EL-122). The fax or email instructions from the [uniform absentee ballot instructions](#) should be followed in these situations and are outlined later in this document.

5. Am I able to include return envelopes that are not pre-printed with the certificate and return address?

Yes, if you do not include an absentee ballot certificate on the envelope, you must include a printed copy of the EL-122 and the correct postage. The voter then will need to follow the fax or email instructions in the [uniform absentee ballot instructions](#):

1. The voter should complete the certificate, sign it, and have a witness sign and address it.
2. The voter should affix the certificate with an adhesive (glue or tape) to the envelope containing the ballot.
3. The voter should put the envelope with the certificate attached into a large envelope, and address it to their clerk.

Please note that failure to affix the certificate in this method is NOT a reason to reject a ballot. However, the certificate must be included and must contain the voter's signature, a witness' signature, and their address to be considered sufficient.

6. What do I do if begin to run out of absentee ballots too?

Do not mail your last absentee ballot. If you begin to run out of ballots, contact your county to let them know you need more ballots. Election Day ballots can also be used for absentee voting.

Please contact us with any questions or concerns that you may have at elections@wi.gov or (608) 261-2028.