

How Elections Are Handled in Skamania County

During the Elections of 2010 there were a number of citizens voicing concerns or just wanting to feel comfortable that their ballots were handled, secured, and counted properly. The Auditor and staff want you to understand how the entire process works and that we are diligent about strict compliance with state law and regulation concerning the elections process. This is a summary of the qualifications and procedures followed by your elections staff.

Qualifications: State law requires at least two certified elections administrators be on staff in each county. We currently have two certified and are training a third who will be certified in 2011. This should cover any unforeseen absences during elections. To become certified each must attend a Secretary of State sponsored 2 day orientation, acquire 40 hours of additional formal elections training, successfully pass a written exam, and complete two years of actual elections experience. To retain their certification each must attend 18 hours of elections training every year. In addition your Elections Manager, through his own initiative, has completed 120 plus hours of specialized elections training which qualifies him as a Certified Elections/Registration Administrator (CERA), one of very few in the nation and the state.

Receiving Your Ballots: Skamania County is a vote by mail county. As such most ballots are received through the Postal Service. We do, however, have three ballot drop boxes located in the more outlying areas for your convenience. One is also available in the Auditor's Office. Ballot security during the retrieval process is vital. Anytime a drop box is opened there must be two people present. Specially designed and numbered security seals are used. They are made so that once attached they cannot be removed without destroying the seal itself. When ballots are removed an election official counts them and another verifies the count. ALL actions involving your ballots must be accomplished with two election officials present. One takes the action, the other verifies it. Both record their action on a specially designed security log. The ballots are then placed in a ballot transport container. A security seal is placed on the transport container and the just emptied drop box. The security seal numbers are recorded on the official log. When the transport containers arrive at the Auditor's Office seal numbers are verified by two election officials and the ballots are placed in a cabinet, locked and sealed.

Posting Your Ballots: When it's time to process your ballots two people are required to be present for their removal from the locked storage container. Both verify (by signature on the security log form) that the seals placed on the containers when stored are still intact. The ballots are then removed and processed with ones received by mail. At this point your sealed ballot (sealed blue envelope) is logged in using a scanner which acknowledges receipt of your ballot and allows us to verify the signature as being the same as on your voter registration. (All

election officials receive signature verification training from the Washington State Patrol.) This also precludes someone from voting multiple times. Once scanned the ballots are bundled in groups of 50 for processing. Each group of 50 is scanned and posted before starting the next group. This allows tight control and eases resolving any issues that may arise. Anytime ballot processing is completed for the day the ballots are returned to security containers, logged in and sealed as previously noted. They remain secured until processing resumes.

Ballot Processing: The process begins again with two people being present when the sealed containers are removed from secure storage. Seal numbers are verified and logged in. Again, this verifies that no tampering has taken place. Two elections workers then begin ballot processing. This process is closely monitored by the certified elections team. One person runs the blue outside envelope through an envelope opener. The yellow security envelope containing your ballot is removed from the blue envelope containing your address and signature. Before any yellow security envelope is opened the blue envelopes are removed from sight of the election workers. The yellow envelopes are then opened and ballots removed. Since the blue envelopes have been removed from the process prior to opening the yellow ones it's impossible to attach a name to a vote. At this point the ballots are unfolded and inspected for any irregularities that would cause a miscount by the ballot scanner and stacked in groups of 50. They look for multiple entries for the same office/issue, marks outside the boxes, torn or damaged ballots or liquid spills. If it is determined by the elections officials that any of these would cause an incorrect tally by the ballot scanner they will duplicate that ballot. Extreme care is taken to ensure the marks on the duplicate are the same as those on your damaged ballot. Once the duplication is complete and verified by two people it is assigned a number and logged on to a duplicate ballot log. The duplicate is processed through the ballot scanner, attached to your original and retained per state law. All ballots are then scanned and recorded on an external memory card called a Mobile Ballot Box (MBB). Each day after the scanning process is complete these MBB's are updated, logged in and secured using the same strict security procedures as with your ballots. (i.e. two people, security seals, locked storage, etc.) No total vote tabulating is allowed prior to 8PM on Election Day.

Election Computer System: The computer used to process your ballot is a dedicated system. The system uses purchased software approved by the Secretary of State's Office for use in the elections process. Within our office, computer access is limited to the certified election officials only. Each has their own special access code. Each time any of them logon, a computer record of what actions were taken is generated. This provides total transparency of all actions taken during the process.

The Tabulation Process: Tabulating (or totaling all votes for each issue/candidate) is done immediately after the polls close on election night. At that time the MBB's are loaded into the

elections dedicated system and the results are electronically tabulated. It is only then that total votes cast for any issue or candidate are available to anyone. The election results are printed (available at the Auditor's Office), posted on the website, and reported to the Secretary of State's Office for dissemination throughout the state.

Auditors Role: It is the present Auditors policy that his role is to ensure that there are adequate trained personnel available to handle elections under any circumstances and to provide oversight, be alert to any irregularities, and ensure complete instructions are given to volunteer election workers. The Auditor will also assist wherever necessary as determined by the Elections Manager. The Auditor has no reason to have access to any lock, key, container, or storage locker that is involved in the security of ballots. The Elections Manager is responsible for ballot storage and security.

Call-in Elections Workers: We maintain a list of part time election workers who assist during peak periods. They are used for ballot processing. Specifically they open envelopes, check ballots for irregularities and organize them for electronic counting. Each take an oath and are giving strict instructions to follow.

General Comment: The Auditor and the Certified Elections Staff will accept nothing less than:

1. Absolute compliance with all applicable laws and regulations.
2. Strict compliance with required security measures and procedures.
3. Total secrecy of any observations made during ballot processing.
4. Complete understanding on the part of election workers as to the do's and don'ts.

This overview is being provided to define for you what actually happens to your ballot once it is mailed or deposited in a ballot drop box. It defines the process in general. Should you have any specific questions or want more detailed information we encourage you to contact us or come in the office so we can show you first hand. We also encourage you to visit during an election where you can observe the actual operation.

It's important for you to realize that the election problems you hear about on TV or that other states are having don't always apply here. Each state conducts their elections using different procedures and, many times, equipment. Your Secretary of State is very proactive in the elections process and establishes very strict rules and procedures for us to follow. The entire process is reviewed after each election to see if fixes are necessary. We receive on site inspections periodically during an actual elections process. Washington State is recognized as one of the top states for election procedures in the country.