

**Spokane County Elections  
Spokane County Washington  
January 30, 2012**

**Where's The Flap**

Voters in Spokane County may notice a difference in their return envelopes starting with the February election. The long flap that seals the envelope has been reduced to regular size. The longer flap had been required since 2005 to conceal the voter's signature but the law was rescinded in 2010. Several counties eliminated the longer flap in 2011, including Thurston, Snohomish and King counties.

**Cost Savings**

Returning to a standard flap saves \$25,000 taxpayer dollars annually and speeds processing. The envelopes are less expensive to print and the weight is slightly less, which reduces the cost of postage when mailing individual ballots.

**Speeds Processing**

With the longer flaps, a window had to be "peeled" open before signatures on the envelopes could be verified to the signatures in the voter registration record. "Peeling" required time every day, with a couple hours required on those days when ballot return was high, especially on Election Day. Not "peeling" reduces staff time, saves labor costs and speeds the counting of ballots.

**Security**

Some voters have expressed concern about identity theft because the signature is visible. The real issue in identity theft is physical possession, not visibility. The longer flap gave a false sense of security at a high price. Even with the longer flap, anyone in physical possession of the return envelope had access to the voter signature.

The best security measures that a voter can take to physically protect their signature is to deposit the voted and sealed ballots directly into either the blue mail boxes provided by the USPS and the white drop boxes provided by the Elections Offices. Experience has shown that these two boxes are safe and secure because they are collected frequently and are always locked.