

USPS Election Mail Issues Experienced in Washington State

Washington State Elections Conference 2016

Tuesday Delivery...

Severely reduced mail delivery on Tuesday is a concern for most states, but it is unlikely USPS procedures will change in the near future.

Recommendation:

- Adjust work schedule to allow for increased mail on Mondays and Wednesdays.
- Process and count ballots received on Election Day.
- Work with constituents to adjust expectations of when valid ballots are received and counted.



Why is mail reduced on Tuesdays?

The USPS now has a two-day delivery standard for first class mail. Mail picked up by the USPS on Friday and Saturday is generally delivered on Mondays. Mail picked up on Monday is delivered Wednesday. Since no mail is picked up on Sunday, the only mail received are the few pieces left over from Friday and Saturday.

Delivery of ballots to voters...

Most counties use non-profit status to deliver ballots to voters. While the USPS has been able to provide expedited service for election mail in the past, new USPS policies reduce the USPS' ability to give preference to election mail. Load leveling further increases delivery time. Non-profit mail may take up to 10 days for delivery.



What is load leveling?

It is the method used to equalize the number of mail pieces delivered each day, usually Friday and Saturday mail. Standard and non-profit mail delivery is held and shifted to lighter mail delivery days.

Recommendation:

- Mail ballots as early as possible to compensate for longer delivery time.
- Work with the USPS to determine the best days for bringing mail to them. Choosing a day with light mail will decrease the delivery time.

(Why does election mail qualify as non-profit mail? The National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) provided this option for election mail that uses USPS information for updating voter registrations may use non-profit status. Washington uses USPS information from forwarded and undeliverable ballots to update voter registration information. However, the USPS is not obligated to provide different service for election mail sent as non-profit mail.)

1. Use Intelligent Mail Barcodes (IMB) to track outgoing and incoming ballots. Using IMB greatly increases the USPS ability to track and resolve mail delivery problems. For optimum information, unique IMB codes must be used on each ballot, coming and going.

Recommendation: Work with the USPS to set up barcodes and tracking information.

2. Include test mail pieces with each mailing. Sending and tracking test mail pieces will give you concrete examples of mail delivery problems and provide you with solid mail information for voters.

Recommendation:

- When sending ballots or other election mail, include test mail pieces to be delivered to your office.
 - Recruit test voters who are willing to receive and track test mail—two minimum from various communities in your county.
- Mail test ballots from various USPS mail boxes in your county, noting the last pickup time of the mail box as well as the date and time of mailing.
- Document and track the receipt date for each test piece.
- Use this procedure for every election.
- Share anomalies and mail issues with your local postal authorities.

3. Early mail pickup deadlines. Many USPS mail boxes post the time mail is picked up. The time posted may be much earlier with USPS policy changes. First Class mail picked up before the deadline is postmarked the same day.

Recommendation: Voters may not realize their ballot will not be postmarked correctly if deposited after the last pickup time. To mitigate this happening:

- Instruct voters to mail ballots before Election Day—preferably five to seven days in advance.
- Provide as many drop boxes as possible in your county; instruct voters to use drop boxes on Election Day.
- If the USPS mail box pickup time has passed, instruct voters to ask a post office employees to hand cancel the ballot.

When you experience mail problems, start with your local postal authority. State postal officials are also available to assist in solving mail problems. *Report the issue to Electionmail.org.*