VOTING SYSTEM CERTIFICATION BY THE OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE

Are there any special requirements for voting equipment?

The Office of the Secretary of State must certify every ballot counting system before it may be sold or operated in Washington State. The equipment vendor must apply to the state for certification, and provide documentation on the system.   The system documentation includes operating manuals, technical descriptions reports from Independent Testing Authorities, on the system's function and performance.

What does an Voting Systems Testing Laboratory (VSTL) do?

The VSTL is a laboratory that reviews the hardware and software associated with each ballot counting system and rates it versus a set of minimum performance standards created by the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) in conjunction with the National Institute of Science and Industry (NIST). The machines are tested under a number of different conditions and hundreds of thousands of test ballots are processed to see that the machine always records every vote and does not record phantom votes. The software is reviewed for simplicity and accuracy. Finally an opinion is given about whether the machine meets the voting systems standards or not.

What process does the Office of the Secretary of State follow in order to certify a ballot counting system?

The Office of the Secretary of State Elections Division reviews the application, the report of the ITA, the manuals, and any documents of certification from other states. A working model of the system is then tested by Office of the Secretary of State staff, to make sure that it meets the following Washington State requirements:

1) Correctly counts votes on ballots for all offices and issues;
2) Ignores votes marked for any office or issue where more than the allowable number of votes have been marked, but correctly counts the properly voted portions of the ballot;
3) Accumulates a count of the specific number of ballots tallied for each precinct, total votes by candidate for each office, and total votes for and against each issue of the ballot in that precinct;
4) Meets the Washington State requirements for a primary;
5) Produces precinct and cumulative totals in printed form;
6) The system meets the EAC standards for voting equipment.

A public hearing/demonstration of equipment is held at the offices of the Secretary of State. Following this hearing a certificate is issued that allows the vendor to sell the equipment in Washington and allows counties to use the equipment if the system meets the requirements.