Ballot Processing: A Day in the Life of a Ballot

1. Your Ballot is Printed.

Ballots are printed and inserted into voter packets by our state certified print vendor. Ballots are printed using special ballot stock with watermark/ballot image. The watermark, color tint and ballot image are designated by the Secretary of State and are specific to this election.

After the ballots are inserted into the packets, the voter's name, address and unique barcode are printed on the outside of the envelope. The packets are checked through quality control to ensure that each voter will receive their correct ballot.

2. Your Ballot is Mailed.

Ballots are automatically mailed out to all voters with active voter registrations in Butte County. They are sent through the United States Postal Service 29 days before the election. Election mail is non-forwardable.

3. Vote and Return Your Ballot.

Once you have marked your ballot. Sign the return envelope and seal your ballot inside. You can return your ballot in one of 3 ways:

- By Mail (no stamp required)
- In a Secure Ballot Drop Box
- At any Voter Assistance Center in the County

Alternatively, if you are unable to return your own voted ballot, you may sign your sealed return envelope over to someone you trust to return it for you.

4. Ballot Received By Elections Division.

We will remove the signature security tabs from the envelopes. Then the ballots are sent through an industrial style mail sorter. This machine scans the unique barcodes, captures the signature image and updates the ballot status in the election management system.

5. Signature Verification.

Trained elections staff compare the signature from the return envelope with the signature on the voter's registration. If the signature matches, the ballot is accepted. If the signature does not match, it enters a "challenged" status. Voters whose ballots have been challenged will be contacted with a letter and a phone call (if we have a phone number on file) to verify if they voted the ballot or not. Once the voter verifies their signature, or provides a signature if it was missing, the ballot will be accepted.

6. We Open the Ballots.

Ballots are extracted from the envelopes and prepared for tabulation. Once the ballot is removed from the envelope it is completely anonymous – there is nothing to link it to the person who voted it. The now empty envelopes are batched up and stored. The ballots are transported to a second secure room to be tabulated.   Anytime ballots are transported, they are moved by a team of two people.

7. We Check the Ballots For Damage.

Any ballots that cannot be read by the tabulation scanners are sent to a duplication team (ex. If the ballot is torn or has a coffee stain). The ballot will be examined to determine the intent of the voter and recreated using a second blank ballot. These matching ballots are serialized and recorded. The duplicated ballot will be returned to the tabulation station to be counted.

8. We Count Your Ballot.

Working in teams, staff run the ballots through scanners that read the marks on the ballot that indicate the voter's choice for candidates and issues, the results are passed through to the tabulation computer. The ballots are inventoried and the ballot images saved and backed up.

9. We Review Voter Intent.

If, for any reason, the tabulation computer is unable to determine voter intent, the ballot is flagged for review. Reasons for review could be that the voter made an ambiguous mark, crossed out a previous selection or perhaps submitted a blank ballot. The ballot will be reviewed to determine voter intent. If necessary corrections will be made through this two-person adjudication team and the ballot results will be passed on to the tabulation computer.

10. Election Results.

Ballot tabulation is conducted at the Elections Office in Oroville. The system used for tabulating results is completely isolated and is not connected to the internet or any other network. The first set of unofficial election results are released after the polls close on Election Day. No results are known to anyone prior to the close of the polls when they are made available to the public for the first time.