



Commonwealth of Virginia
Fairfax County

Absentee Ballot

Pre-processing Phase I Ballot Extraction Operation Manual

November 2, 2021 Gubernatorial Election

A publication of Fairfax County, Virginia

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Fairfax County Office of Elections Contact Information

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Background

The Fairfax County Office of Elections is committed to providing each citizen of Fairfax County with the opportunity to exercise their right to vote in an efficient and equitable manner. This effort is accomplished in accordance with the Constitutions of the United States and the Commonwealth of Virginia, as well as the Code of Virginia.

It is the responsibility of the Office of Elections to ensure each election is run fairly and openly. Virginia state law requires all Election Office employees to execute their duties to the best of their abilities and that they studiously endeavor to prevent, fraud, deceit, and abuse when conducting elections.

The Absentee Ballot division within the Office of Elections, is responsible for executing and managing those actions required to mail out, receive, and account for absentee ballots sent to registered voters in Fairfax County. Absentee ballots are only sent to voters who have requested, in writing, to vote absentee.

There are several processes involved to accurately and efficiently; receive, sort, count, and record receipt of the voter's ballot into the statewide voter database.

This manual will detail the actions necessary to open and extract absentee ballots returned to the Office of Elections.

Ballot Extraction Process Overview

If a voter wishes to vote absentee, their first step is to submit, in writing, an absentee ballot application to the Fairfax County Office of Elections. The application must be mailed, emailed, or submitted online through the Department of Elections online portal. An absentee ballot cannot be requested via telephone. Once the voter's request is approved, an absentee ballot is sent to the requester within three business days.

After the voter receives and votes their ballot, the ballot, which should now be sealed inside a return mailer, is returned to the Office of Elections using various methods:

- a. United States Postal Service (USPS)
- b. Commercial mail delivery system (FedEx, DHL, UPS, etc.)
- c. Hand delivered to early voting satellite locations or to the Fairfax County Office of Elections including 24/7 outdoor drop box
- d. Hand delivered on election day to polling places

When the return mailer is received in the office, it is sorted, stamped with the date received, and counted. Once counted, the mailer is trayed by day of receipt and is ready for transporting to the mail check-in operation. In the mail check-in operation, the voter's ballot status is changed from "issued" to "marked and then changed to "pre-processed" into the statewide voter database (VERIS). When completed, mailers are trayed and ready for transporting to Pre-processing Phase 1, the Mail Opening and Extraction Operation.

Mail Opening and Extracting Operation - Step by Step

Mailers in green trays identifies that the Check-in Team has completed ballot check-in into the statewide voter database known as VERIS. These ballots are now ready for Pre-processing Phase I, Opening and Extraction.

Opening returned mailers:

1. Two elections office staff go to secure storage ballot room and pull the trays needed by the extraction teams for that day. When pulling trays, select the oldest dated tray first.
2. Transport mailers using a library cart to the designated mail opening and extraction room.
3. Using the Omaton Envelopener machine, carefully open the mailers and batch in estimated groups of 700. Always open the oldest dated tray first. Place the batched quantity (700) of opened mailers into yellow trays. Yellow trays identify that the mailers are opened and ready for extraction.
4. Do not open any ballots that cannot be extracted by the end of the workday.

Extracting ballots from return mailers:

1. Extracting teams will be set up as 4-person teams, using a 4-table pod set up.
2. Two Election Officers (not on staff) will observe the operation.
3. Supervisor/designated staff gives each 4-person team a batch of approximately 700 return mailers.

4. Each team member takes a handful of return mailers from their trays and removes the folded ballot from its return mailer. When removing the folded ballot from its mailer, always work from your tabletop area. Do not place return mailers on a surface below your worktable (i.e., your lap).
5. When extracting, place the folded ballot in the tray to the right and the empty mailer in tray to the left.
6. Place any visibly damaged ballots (torn/missing corners, damaged timing marks, etc.) into the tray designated for non-scannable (DNS) ballots. Place its associated mailer into the empty return mailer tray.
7. When the yellow trays on the team table are empty, count the folded ballots and empty return mailers. One person counts ballots, the other person counts empty return mailers. Verify your first count by switching people; the person who counted ballots now counts empty mailers and the person who counted mailers, now counts ballots. **Counts must match before moving forward!**
8. After the counts have been verified, the final count becomes the batch quantity.
9. The table team leader completes a *Ballot Batch Chain of Custody Team Log* ensuring team names, number of ballots, number of empty return mailers, and number of damaged ballots is entered.
10. Unfold the ballots laying them flat, with office races facing down, into a #3 ballot batch box marked with the batch number. Bundle empty return mailers in counts of 50, rubber band them, and place the bundles into a #5 box.
11. Place the completed *Ballot Batch Chain of Custody Team Log* on top of the scannable ballots. Then place the visibly damaged ballots on top of the log. The order of materials inside the #3 ballot batch box should be:
 - a. scannable ballots
 - b. completed team batch log
 - c. damaged/non-scannable ballots.

When the box is complete, call the supervisor or designated staff member.

12. Once, the supervisor or designated staff member has verified that all required materials (ballots and batch log) are inside the batch box and completed properly, that person will:
 - a. Assign a batch number to the box
 - b. Enter the batch number on the team log
 - c. Place the batch number on the box
 - d. Place the pre-numbered #3 label into the batch box. This label is affixed to the box by the scan team once the ballots in the box have been scanned.

13. Supervisor/designated staff then records the batch quantities (ballots, empty mailers, damaged ballots) on the master log. Once recorded, the box is sealed by two staff members using black security tape. Both individuals will sign the sealed box.
14. Sealed batch boxes are then transported to a secured storage area or directly to the Pre-processing Phase II, the Scanning Team for further handling.
15. Empty return mailers are placed in #5 boxes, which when full are sealed with red security tape, labeled

Email ballot extraction from mailers:

Email ballots are received from overseas voters in various sized return mailers. These mailers may require to be opened manually. If needed, use a letter opener. They are separated and accounted for in a manner like the above method with some exceptions:

1. Once the email ballot is removed from its return mailer, the ballot is unfolded and placed face down (office races facing down) in a security case and stored until transferred to the Ballot Duplication Team.
2. Its empty mailer is placed in a #5 box that is marked with the date range of the mailers contained inside.