

Wisconsin Election Commission: Absentee envelopes get an upgrade

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MADISON, Wis. – New absentee ballot envelopes the Wisconsin Elections Commission recently approved will provide voters with a more user-friendly way to vote absentee in upcoming elections.

The approval of the envelopes is the first step in the rollout. Next, WEC Commissioners will focus on approving uniform instructions that will accompany the certificate envelopes explaining how to use them. Staff will also develop public information materials to spread awareness of the new envelope designs. WEC Commissioners approved the new envelope designs on a 6-0 vote at an open meeting on Friday, Aug. 4. The approved envelopes are those in which voters receive and return their absentee ballots. The Commission's action does not affect ballots themselves.

The Commission approved the designs of the Absentee Mailer Envelope (EL-120), the envelope containing the blank absentee ballot and materials that goes to the voter; and the Absentee Certificate Envelope (EL-122), the inside envelope in which the voter returns his or her voted absentee ballot to the clerk. There are regular and military versions of the EL-120, and regular, military, and special voting deputy versions of the EL-122.

Both the EL-120 and EL-122 are being upgraded to feature bold, full-color designs that will be more easily identified by voters and for USPS processing. No changes were made to EL-120 language. The EL-122 certificate envelope features several improvements to ensure statutory and voter compliance. These changes include a bold, three-step checklist for voters to follow; an "alert" icon calling attention to the need for witness information to be included on the envelopes; a separate field for a witness to provide their printed name; a prompt for the witness to provide their

street number, street name, and city as part of their witness address; a new color scheme to more easily identify which type of envelope a voter is utilizing; and a reminder that absentee ballots must arrive by 8 p.m. on Election Day.

“While the new envelope designs don’t involve drastic changes, we think the new design will make it easier for absentee voters and their witness to follow the instructions and complete the process accurately and fully,” said WEC Administrator Meagan Wolfe.

As part of the redesign process, WEC staff conducted usability testing sessions at 11 locations around the state, from Prairie du Chien to Rhinelander. In all, staff engaged with more than 250 people, including clerks, voters, and their witnesses, along with election inspectors and representatives of USPS.

The Commission vote requires that the newly designed envelopes be used for all subsequent elections. Earlier, the Commission approved the use of up to \$600,000 in federal funds for the 2023 Absentee Ballot Envelope Subgrant Reimbursement Program. The subgrant program is intended to help jurisdictions defray the cost of printing the new envelopes and is open for applications until June 30, 2024.

The new envelope designs can be found at the following link under item 5 (Approved Designs): <https://elections.wi.gov/memo/absentee-envelope-designs--approved-commission>