



Office of Montana Secretary of State

Election and Voter Services Division

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BALLOT RECONCILIATION/CHAIN OF CUSTODY AND SAMPLE CHECKLIST

Election Administrators must ensure that all ballots are accounted for in order to protect the integrity of the election and to instill confidence in the election process with the public. Each county should follow these procedures so that they are able to detect and resolve problems as they occur. Proper ballot reconciliation can help avoid counting and tabulation errors.

BALLOT RECONCILIATION FORMS (see <https://sosmt.gov/elections/official-forms/#ballot-reconciliation>, unless otherwise noted):

1. **Absentee-Mail Ballot Reconciliation** - used to reconcile absentee ballots (or mail ballots if a mail ballot election) on a daily basis (or as needed for small counties). One form per precinct.
2. **Early Absentee Ballot Preparation Reconciliation** – used if doing early prep of absentee ballots. One form per precinct; signed by election administrator and election officials conducting early prep.
3. **Ballot Certification Report** – used to track number of ballots sent to each precinct, and number of ballots retained for absentee voting. One form per precinct. Must be signed by EA and verified and signed by chief precinct judge.
4. **Ballot Reconciliation Report (for Poll Book)** – used to reconcile number of voters in poll book to number of ballots issued. Must be signed by no less than two precinct judges. One copy stays with the poll book, one copy goes to the election administrator (this form is supposed to be printed on NCR paper). Multiple copies should be provided for each poll book to accommodate early pickup of ballots.
5. **(If Applicable) Ballot Reconciliation Report for Precinct Tabulator** – used to reconcile number of ballots counted on each precinct tabulator with number of ballots from poll book ballot reconciliation report. Must be signed by no less than two precinct election judges.
6. **Chain of Custody and Seal Log (see <https://sosmt.gov/elections/official-forms/#voting-system-and-security-forms>)** – used to track ballot chain of custody. Each time ballots are accessed, verify the existing seal number and log the new seal number. The seal removed should be placed on the Security Seal Log. The election officials accessing/sealing the ballots must sign and note the time (2 election officials/judges must sign each part of the form).
 - a. **Part 1** – ballots are sealed by EA before transport to the polls; seal number is logged.
 - b. **Part 2** - before polls open, chief election judge or designee verifies the existing seal number and opens ballot container. Container that voted ballots will go into is sealed, and the seal number is logged.
 - c. **Part 3** – at early pickup of ballots, OR after polls close, chief election judge or designee verifies the existing seal number and opens ballot container to remove and transport ballots to election office/counting center.
 - i. If early pickup, ballot container is sealed and seal number is logged. The form should transport with ballots, and a new form must be started with the new seal number logged.
 - d. **Part 4** – election administrator/counting board receives voted ballots, verifies seal number and opens ballot container to begin counting.
 - i. If early pickup, Part 4 will be completed once at early pickup on log form #1, and once at end of night on log form #2.

BALLOT RECONCILIATION CHECKLIST

UPON RECEIPT OF BALLOTS FROM VENDOR

Check-in ballots upon receipt. Note total number of ballots received for each precinct on the [Ballot Certification Report](#).

BEFORE DELIVERY TO POLLS

Document the number of ballots delivered to the polling place for each precinct on the **Ballot Certification Report**.

Document the seal number on the ballots delivered to the polling place for each precinct on the **Chain of Custody and Seal Log for Ballots**.

AT POLLS ON ELECTION DAY

Verify the seal number on the ballots with the seal number recorded on the [Chain of Custody and Seal Log for Ballots](#) as soon as ballots are received at the polls.

If ballots are picked up for counting before voting has closed, verify the number of ballots being picked up with the number of ballots issued from [Ballot Reconciliation Report \(for Poll Book\)](#) from the poll book.

Seal ballots being picked up, record seal number on Ballot Chain of Custody and Seal Log and include the (early pickup) **Ballot Reconciliation Report (for Poll Book)** and **Chain of Custody and Seal Log for Ballots** form with ballots; seal ballot box back up, record new seal number on a new Ballot Chain of Custody and Seal Log.

After voting has closed, verify the number of ballots in ballot box with the number of ballots issued from the **Ballot Reconciliation Report (for Poll Book)** from poll book (and with the number issued according to the voting machine tape if applicable).

Seal ballots being delivered to counting center and record seal number on **Chain of Custody and Seal Log for Ballots** and include **Ballot Reconciliation Report (for Poll Book)** and **Chain of Custody and Seal Log for Ballots** form with ballots.

AT COUNTING CENTER

When receiving ballots from the polls, confirm the seal number on the transported ballots with the seal number recorded on the **Chain of Custody and Seal Log for Ballots** form.

Verify the number of ballots *to be counted* with the number documented on the **Ballot Reconciliation Report (for Poll Book)**.

Have designated personnel verify the number of ballots *to be counted* per the **Ballot Reconciliation Report (for Poll Book)** with the number *actually counted* by the tabulator before tabulated ballots are sealed.