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**Sent:** Thursday, May 13, 2021 1:22 PM

**To:** Rep Rayfield <Rep.DanRayfield@oregonlegislature.gov>; Rogers, Danny M - PORTLAND, OR <danny.m.rogers@usps.gov>; Brownlie, Caroline R - Washington, DC <Caroline.R.Brownlie@usps.gov>; Belt, David C - Washington, DC <David.C.Belt@usps.gov>; Healy, Abigail K - Washington, DC <Abigail.K.Healy@usps.gov>

**Subject:** RE: [EXTERNAL] Follow up questions on postmarked

Hi Ryann,

Thank you for your questions regarding the Postal Service's ballot postmarking policy and procedures. We have addressed each of your questions individually below. If you have any follow-up questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

1. What are the other time/date indicators on the envelope, other than the postmark? If a piece of mail does not have a postmark, is there another way to tell when it was first in the hands of USPS?

The Postal Service does not uniformly apply date indicators other than the postmark on mailpieces. However, tracking data for individual ballots may be available if a mailer, in this case an election official, uses a unique Intelligent Mail barcode on the return ballot envelope that it provides to voters. That tracking information would include the date on which the mailpiece was first scanned within the Postal Service's processing network. This scan data is available only for mailpieces that go through automated processing and sorting; where a piece is processed and sorted manually, no tracking data is generated. Additionally, non-unique, or non-serialized, Intelligent Mail barcodes cannot be used to provide data about individual ballots. It is ultimately up to the states to decide what alternatives, if any, they would accept as evidence of timely mailing in the absence of a legible postmark.

2. Does all mail (specifically ballots) get postmarked?

The Postal Service does not postmark, or "cancel," every piece of mail in our system in the normal course of operations, since the primary purpose of cancellation is to ensure that postage cannot be reused, and some categories of postage are pre-cancelled before they enter the mailstream.

In recognition of the importance that the election laws in some states place on postmarks, it has long been the Postal Service's policy to try to ensure that every identifiable ballot mailed by voters receives a postmark, regardless of the postage-payment method used.

Every federal election cycle, the Postal Service instructs its employees throughout the country about our ballot postmarking processes and procedures, reviews the standard operating procedures for ballot postmarking, and reinforces these procedures through stand-up talks. We have also developed and monitored processes to ensure that ballots are postmarked, and the Postal Service will continue those efforts.

Although we instruct our employees throughout the country to adhere to our ballot postmarking policy, such practice does deviate from normal procedures, and therefore we acknowledge that circumstances can arise that prevent ballots from receiving a legible postmark (e.g., ink smears on a machine, the mailpiece is stuck to another when it runs through the canceller machine, a ballot is included in a tray of metered return mail from a business that bypasses the cancellation machine as part of our normal processing procedures, or if an employee does not recognize the mailpiece as a ballot). To increase the operational likelihood that a mailpiece will receive a legible postmark, we advise election officials to use automation-compatible, letter sized envelopes for mail-in ballots.

3. When in the process is a postmark put on an envelope? Does this change depending on where a piece of mail is from? Essentially, does a ballot mailed from Portland and a ballot mailed from Redmond get to the sorting facility on the same day – despite having to travel farther?

Throughout our network, mailpieces need to be postmarked with the correct date in order to maintain the integrity of the postmark. This means that mailpieces, and specifically return ballots, taken into the Postal Service's custody on the same day must all receive the same postmark date. The Postal Service's network and processes are set up so that all identifiable return ballots collected on a given day will be postmarked with that day's date, no matter how far they need to travel to the originating processing facility.

The postmark is typically applied during an initial processing scan at an originating processing facility. After collection, which can occur through a variety of locations like Post Offices or mailboxes, mail is transported that same day to an originating processing facility. Postmarks are typically applied by our automated cancellation equipment at the originating processing facility, and our cancellation machines are programmed to ensure that the accurate date of collection is applied even where, for example, the mailpieces are run through the equipment shortly after Midnight (and thus technically the "following" day). Although postmarks are typically applied at the originating processing facility, they may be applied earlier in the process, but with the same date as an automated postmark, if a voter requests a manual postmark when mailing their ballot at a retail facility. Regardless of where the postmark is applied or how far the mailpiece travels before it receives a postmark, the date applied will reflect the date that the mailpiece is collected.

4. Can voters use both retail locations and drop boxes to drop off ballots on election day? What is the process for these getting postmarked/having a time/date indicator?

Yes, voters could use Post Office locations, retail facilities, blue collection boxes, and mailboxes to mail their ballots on election day. However, voters should be aware of posted collection times on collection boxes and at Post Offices and retail locations. Voters should also be mindful of when mail is delivered and picked up at their residential mailbox. Ballots deposited after the last posted collection time or after the carrier has serviced a residential address will not be collected, and therefore will not be postmarked, until the following day (excluding Sunday). Voters should similarly be aware of mail collection times and practices if ballots are deposited in an office or residential mailroom.

Return ballot envelopes will be postmarked with the date the Postal Service accepted custody of the mailpiece, meaning the date it was collected. The date of the postmark will not change based on how the mailpiece entered the mailstream. As explained above, in most cases, the postmark is applied at the originating processing facility by one of our automated machines. Voters who mail their ballots at a Post Office or retail facility may request that the clerk apply a manual postmark when it is presented to the clerk for mailing.

We hope the information contained in this letter is helpful, and we look forward to continuing to work with Oregon, its elected officials, and election officials.

Thank you,

Justin Glass