

Absentee Voting -- Common Misconceptions

Before every gubernatorial or presidential election, the County Clerk's Office fields numerous questions about "early voting" and absentee voting. This attempts to clear up some common misconceptions about voting by absentee ballot.

Absentee Voting vs. 'Early Voting'

Absentee voting is the only way to "vote early" in Wisconsin. However, **it is not true early voting**. True early voting is much like voting on Election Day: No absentee application or envelope is necessary; you simply complete your ballot and place it in a ballot box.

Absentee voting by mail has been available since September 18, and in-person absentee voting began on Monday, October 20. While you can vote by absentee ballot for any reason, **there is no benefit to it, other than voter convenience**. Your ballot will not be counted until Election Day. **Voting at the polls on Election Day is always the preferable, most cost-effective, and secure way to cast your ballot.**

Absentee Voting Takes Place at the MUNICIPAL Level

In Wisconsin, voting takes place at the *local* – not county – level. When you vote at the polls on Election Day, you go to your town, village or city's designated polling place. The same concept applies to absentee voting; you contact your town, village or city clerk to obtain an absentee ballot. **You cannot get an absentee ballot from the County Clerk's Office.**

In the (ENTER DATE) edition of the *Ladysmith News*, this office published an election notice that lists all the County's municipal clerks, their contact information, and the hours they may be available for in-person absentee voting. If you do not have access to that notice, please follow this [LINK \(Enter link to our web page and make sure the absentee voting notice is there\)](#)

Special Considerations for Town Residents

As is the case in other rural areas of the state, most of our County's towns only have part-time clerks, due to limited budgets. Some clerks even have full-time jobs elsewhere. Please keep this in mind when requesting an absentee ballot. Unless your town has regular office hours (you can determine this by following the link above), **you must call ahead to make an appointment for in-person absentee voting**. If your clerk is not available when you call, leave a voice message, and your call will be returned. **You cannot just "show up" at your town hall, your clerk's residence, or, if you clerk has another job, his/her other place of business, and expect to vote absentee on the spot.** You must arrange a time and place that is mutually agreeable to you and your clerk.

Absentee Voting is a Privilege

Some County residents get upset that they cannot vote absentee in-person at any time. Please be patient with your busy municipal clerk, and keep this Wisconsin State Statute in mind: "... voting is a constitutional right **In contrast, voting by absentee ballot is a privilege** exercised wholly outside the traditional safeguards of the polling place the privilege of voting by absentee ballot must be carefully regulated to prevent the potential for fraud or abuse ..." (Ch. 6.84(1), Wis. Stats.)

Polls are open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Election Day in each municipality, to offer times before and after most work shifts. If you work an extraordinarily long shift, there are also provisions in the statutes for employers to allow electors reasonable time off to vote.

If you still need to cast an absentee ballot, please remember that this method of voting *is* a privilege, and you must take personal responsibility for requesting your ballot in a timely manner and returning it just as timely. If you are already registered to vote in your municipality, you can request an absentee ballot by mail until Thursday, October 30 at 5 p.m. If you wish to vote absentee in-person with your municipal clerk, you must do so by Friday, October 31 at 5 p.m.

Make every effort to ensure that your municipal clerk receives your absentee ballot by Election Day, so that it can be counted with all other ballots. Though the law allows late absentee ballots to be counted (if the ballot is postmarked by Election Day and received by 4 p.m. the Friday after the election), this is not recommended. The practice has the potential to delay election results and also costs your municipality (and thus you, as a taxpayer) more money, since town officials must hold a special meeting to count these late ballots.

If you have further questions about absentee voting or elections, feel free to contact the County Clerk's Office at [715-532-2100](tel:715-532-2100).

Denise Wetzel, Rusk County Clerk