

Election Observer Guidelines

Overview

Election observers may wish to view election processes and procedures at various locations:

1. Santa Cruz County Clerk/Elections. 701 Ocean Street, Room 210, in Santa Cruz
2. Santa Cruz County Clerk/Elections Operations Center: 2809 Mission Street, in Santa Cruz
3. Polling places designated for each election
4. Watsonville City Clerk's Office when they are conducting early voting for Primary and General Elections. 275 Main St., 4th Floor, in Watsonville.

Check In Procedures

1. All observers must sign in upon arrival.
2. An Election Observer Badge will be issued and must be worn at all times.
3. When leaving for the day, observers must sign out and return the badge to the front counter.

If necessary, Observers who fail to comply with the rules/procedures contained in these guidelines may be asked to leave and/or a local law enforcement agency may be called for assistance.

Interfering with the Election Officers holding an election, or with Voters lawfully exercising their rights of voting at an election, is punishable by imprisonment in the state prison for 16 months and up to 3 years (California Elections Code – Section 18502).

Election Officers will cooperate with any reasonable request from observers.

General Rules at Central Voting Locations

Observers may...

1. Observe the proceedings at the central voting location, including voter check in procedures and ballot deposits.

Observers may not...

1. Interfere in any way with the conduct of any election.
2. Use the telephone.
3. Wear candidate badges, discuss candidates or issues, or bring any campaign material into the polling place, and/or within 100 feet of the entrance to the polling place.
4. Sit at the official worktable or handle any of the official voting equipment, supplies, or ballots.
5. Use the area between the official worktable and voting booths as an observation point/post.
6. Use cellular telephones, pagers or two-way radios inside the polling place, and/or within 100 feet of the entrance to the polling place.
7. Photograph, videotape, or otherwise record a voter entering or exiting a polling place with intent of dissuading them from voting.

General Rules at the Polling Places

Observers may...

1. Check in with the Election Officers and let them know who you are, who you represent and your plans for observing
2. Observe the proceedings at the polls, including the closing procedures.
3. Take information from the Public Alpha Index that is posted near the entrance.
4. Look at the copy of the Public Alpha Index being updated at the worktable (if the Election Officers are not using it and there are no Voters waiting to vote.)

Observers may not....

1. Interfere in any way with the conduct of any election.
2. Monopolize and/or remove the posted Public Indexes so that others are unable to use them.
3. Insist that the Election Officers stop processing Voters so Poll Watchers can view the Public Index being updated at the worktable.

Note: The Public Index is continuously being updated, at least once each hour, until 6 p.m. as long as it does not interfere with the processing of voters.

4. Use the telephone or other polling place facilities.
5. Wear candidate badges, discuss candidates or issues, or bring any campaign material into the polling place, and/or within 100 feet of the entrance to the polling place.
6. Sit at the official worktable or handle any of the official voting equipment, supplies, or ballots.
7. Use the area between the official worktable and voting booths as an observation point/post.
8. Interfere in any way with the closing of the polls.
9. Use cellular telephones, pagers or two-way radios inside the polling place, and/or within 100 feet of the entrance to the polling place.

General Rules for Observing the Vote-by-Mail Ballot Processing

1. No observer shall interfere with the orderly processing of vote-by-mail ballot return envelopes or processing and counting of absentee ballots, including touching or handling of the ballots or envelopes. (Elections Code §15104e)
2. Observers will be permitted access to a designated observation area, sufficiently close to enable them to observe and challenge whether individuals handling vote-by-mail ballots are following established procedures (Elections Code 15104d)
3. If the challenge process unduly impedes or interferes with the verification process, challenges shall be discontinued.
4. Radios, cameras, and tape recorders are not allowed. Pagers and cellular phones must be set to vibrate or off mode while observing the canvass. You may use one of the telephones in the front office should you need to make a call.
5. The individual's function is to observe that procedures are followed. Observers cannot assist in operations, touch or handle any ballots or other election-related materials.
6. All questions concerning a procedure should be directed to the Gail or Tricia and not directly to employees.
7. The number of observers may be limited so as not to interfere with the process. Observers should avoid physical contact with employees.
8. Observers are to hold discussions and conversations outside the designated Canvass work areas.
9. Observers will be allowed into the canvass work areas only when employees are performing canvass operations.
10. Operations will continue as scheduled whether or not an observer is present.

Ballot Challenges

1. Any member of the county grand jury, and at least one member each of the political party Central Committees or County Councils who have a candidate on the ballot, and any other interested organizations, shall be permitted to observe and challenge the manner in which the vote-by-mail ballots are handled, from the processing of vote-by-mail ballot return envelopes through the counting and disposition of the ballots (Elections Code §15104b).
2. Observers may not challenge signatures on vote-by-mail ballot return envelopes. Only the elections official shall perform signature comparison, in accordance with Division 3 of the California Elections Code.
3. Observers may challenge whether the individuals handling vote-by-mail ballots are following established procedures. Please see established procedures for processing vote-by-mail ballots provided by the Santa Cruz County Clerk/Elections Department.

General Rules for Observing Voting System Preparations at the Operations Center

Observers may...

1. Observe the proceedings at the Operations Center, including:
 - a. Logic and Accuracy Testing of Insight scanners and Edge touchscreens
 - b. Programming of Result Cartridges and MemoryPacks
 - c. Sealing, storage and security of voting units
 - d. Asset tracking of equipment
 - e. Ballot quality control, testing, and security
 - f. Chain of custody records for equipment and ballots
 - g. Preparation of polling place supplies for delivery to the polling sites
 - h. Preparation of voting supplies for pick up by the Inspectors

Observers may not...

1. Interfere in any way with the preparation of the election.
2. Use the Operations Center telephone, except in cases of an emergency.
3. Wear candidate badges, discuss candidates or issues, or bring any campaign material into the Operations Center.
4. Sit at any designated official worktable or handle any of the official voting equipment, supplies, or ballots.
5. Enter the caged area without a staff with a green badge escorting you.
6. Walk around the Operations Center without an escort who is wearing a green, blue or yellow badge.
7. Use cellular telephones, pagers or two-way radios inside the elections Operations Center.
8. Photograph, videotape, or otherwise record activities occurring at the Operations Center without approval of James Davies.

Questions

Please direct all questions regarding observing elections procedures to

- Gail Pellerin at 831-454-2419, gail.pellerin@santacruzcounty.us, or
- Tricia Webber at 831-454-2409, tricia.webber@santacruzcounty.us