

**721—21.359(53) Processing absentee ballots before election day.** The commissioner may only direct the absentee and special voters precinct board to open envelopes marked with affidavits on the Monday before election day under the following circumstances:

For any election, only if the commissioner has provided secrecy envelopes (or folders) pursuant to subrule 21.359(1) and the commissioner determines removing secrecy envelopes from envelopes marked with affidavits is necessary due to the quantity of voted absentee ballots received as set forth in Iowa Code section 53.23, subsection 3, paragraph “a.”

For general elections, if the commissioner convenes the absentee and special voters precinct board pursuant to Iowa Code section 53.23, subsection 3, paragraph “c,” to begin tabulation of absentee ballots.

**21.359(1)** The secrecy envelope shall completely cover the ballot. The envelope shall have the following message printed on it using at least 24-point type:

# Secrecy Envelope

After you vote, put your ballot in here.

**21.359(2)** When the absentee and special voters precinct board convenes to begin processing absentee ballots, the board shall first review voters’ affidavits to determine which ballots will be accepted for counting and prepare the notices to those voters whose ballots have been rejected for the reasons set forth in Iowa Code section 53.25. Envelopes marked with affidavits containing ballots that are rejected shall be stored in the manner prescribed by Iowa Code section 53.26. The applications submitted for rejected ballots shall be stored in a secure location for the time period required by Iowa Code section 50.19.

**21.359(3)** Envelopes marked with affidavits containing ballots that have been accepted for counting by the absentee and special voters precinct board shall be stacked with the affidavits facing down. The envelopes shall be opened and the secrecy envelope containing the ballot shall be removed.

**21.359(4)** If a voter has not enclosed the ballot in a secrecy envelope and the ballot has not been folded in a manner that conceals all votes marked on the ballot, the officials shall put the ballot in a secrecy envelope without examining the ballot.

**21.359(5)** The following security procedures shall be followed:

*a.* The process shall be witnessed by observers appointed by the county chairperson of each of the political parties referred to in Iowa Code section 49.13, subsection 2. If, after receiving notice from the commissioner pursuant to Iowa Code section 53.23, subsection 3, paragraph “a,” any of the political parties fail to appoint observers, the commissioner may continue with the proceedings.

*b.* No ballots shall be counted or examined before election day except as provided in Iowa Code section 53.23, subsection 3, paragraph “c.”

*c.* When secrecy envelopes are removed from envelopes marked with affidavits on the day before an election and not tabulated as permitted by Iowa Code section 53.23, subsection 3, paragraph “c,” the number of secrecy envelopes shall be recorded before the ballots are stored and the number shall be verified before any ballots are removed from the secrecy envelopes on election day. The ballots may be bundled and sealed in groups of a specified number to make counting easier.

This rule is intended to implement Iowa Code section 53.23 as amended by 2014 Iowa Acts, House File 2366, division II.

[**ARC 8045B**, IAB 8/26/09, effective 7/27/09; **ARC 8779B**, IAB 6/2/10, effective 7/1/10; **ARC 1549C**, IAB 7/23/14, effective 8/27/14; **ARC 3447C**, IAB 11/8/17, effective 12/31/17]