



From the Office of Secretary of State

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Audit of 2012 ballots confirms accuracy of Nebraska voting machines

LINCOLN – The use of vote-tabulation equipment remains extremely accurate, as determined by a recently conducted audit by Secretary of State John Gale. The audit was ordered to confirm results from the November 2012 general election. Similar audits have been conducted after every statewide election since 2008.

Ballots were examined from 29 randomly selected precincts in 19 counties across Nebraska (2 percent of the state's total) and were compared to results obtained through use of the optical-scanning equipment. A total of 14,687 ballots were hand counted in three contests – U.S. Senate, proposed Amendment 2 and a local race determined by the county election official.

In 25 of the precincts, there were no differences between the machine count and the hand count.

In two precincts, three ballots were not read correctly because of faint marks left on the ballot. There were also a few instances of poll worker error where poll workers had attempted to rerun damaged ballots resulting in a discrepancy between the number of machine counted ballots and those that were compared in two other precincts.

"Random audits have been recommended by various studies to provide public assurance of machine count accuracy. We adopted that recommendation in 2008. For each of our random audits of 2 percent of ballots cast, we have been consistently pleased with the results," explained Gale.

For the 2012 general election audit, the accuracy was .0004% which has been the standard result. This compares with a hand-count election error rate of two to four percent. "Our electronic tabulation is a thousand times more accurate. There have been many advantages of electronic tabulation, and accuracy is definitely one of them," said Gale.

In addition to the post audit, a check of the election equipment is conducted before each election takes place. "It's called a logic and accuracy test," explained Neal Erickson, deputy secretary of state for elections.

"Basically, county election officials fill out samples of each ballot that will be used in their precincts and run them through the optical scanner to ensure that they are ready correctly. Both tests ensure the reliability and accuracy of our system."

In Nebraska, voters use paper ballots that are counted by optical-scanning. Those scanners have been in use in the state since the 1980's and statewide since 2006.

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