

Elections-services vendor cites printing error for ink splotches on some ballots

LIVINGSTON, MT, October 14, 2020 – A Park County voter alerted the Elections Office Tuesday that her mail-in ballot had arrived with an ink splotch in an oval next to a candidate's name. This information triggered an immediate investigation by the Elections Office.

“We were notified of what appeared to be a ‘marked’ ballot sent to a voter and, after an investigation, have found random splotches of ink on some ballots, not necessarily in the ovals, but sometimes off in the margins or white space,” Park County Elections Administrator Maritza Reddington said Wednesday.

“That voter has returned her ballot to the Elections Office and received a new one. Her original ballot was voided,” she said.

Reddington immediately contacted Election Systems & Software (ES&S), the Omaha, Nebraska-based company hired to provide secure election products and services, including ballot printing, for the Nov. 3 general election in Park County.

“They verified that the ink spots are the result of a printing problem,” she said.

She also contacted the Montana Secretary of State's Office, which oversees elections.

“ES&S is the only vendor certified in Montana,” Reddington said. “We have used them for several years.”

At least one other Montana county has experienced similar problems.

The privately held elections-services company acknowledged the error Tuesday.

“ES&S wishes to thank the voter who noticed on their absentee ballot an errant speck of toner or ink that inadvertently appeared in an oval,” Lori Mommaerts, an ES&S representative, said. “These errant specks of ink are a printing error of ES&S partner printer and should have been caught during a quality check before the ballots were delivered to the county. ES&S is working with the county to remedy the situation.”

Any voter who sees an ink splotch in an oval on their ballot should alert the Elections Office immediately to arrange for a replacement ballot, Reddington and Mommaerts said.

Park County opted for mail ballots in both the primary and the general elections this year in light of ongoing public-health concerns about the Covid-19 pandemic. The general-election ballots were sent to voters on Friday, Oct. 9.

“As I said in August, I am confident that a mail-ballot election is the best solution for Park County in these unprecedented times,” Reddington said. “This plan protects the fundamental right to vote while reducing the potential for Covid-19 spread.”

ES&S provides voting machines, tabulators, scanners, and other technology, along with election management, technical support, and voting-by-mail services, according to its website.

For more information, contact Reddington at 442.4110 or email ES&S at media@esssvote.com