Post-Election Hand Count Audit

Post-Election Hand Count Audit Requirement

All counties and local political subdivisions that tabulate voting system ballots electronically are required to conduct the Post-Election Hand Count Audit.

Other Political Subdivisions Contracting with County

In elections conducted jointly with your political subdivisions, a separate Post-Election Hand Count Audit for the political subdivision elections will **NOT** be required if the political subdivision shares a joint ballot with the county

In this instance, the Post-Election Hand Count Audit for the county will serve as the political subdivision's required Post-Election Hand Count Audit

Local political subdivisions should check with their county elections office to determine whether they or the county will be conducting their Post-Election Hand Count Audit

Political subdivisions in counties participating in the Countywide Polling Place Program will have to select **three** polling locations to conduct their Post-Election Hand Count Audit

Conducting the Post-Election Hand Count Audit

The Post-Election Hand Count Audit must be conducted after every election using paper ballots counted with an electronic voting system. **This includes marked paper ballots and paper ballots generated by a ballot marking device.**

It includes all ballots that were counted with a precinct or central scanner and reported as part of your unofficial results on election night. It also includes:

- Early voting in person and by mail ballots that were counted with a precinct scanner or central scanner.
- Ballots cast on a paperless DRE are exempt from the Post-Election Hand Count Audit.

Initial Steps of the Post-Election Hand Count Audit

For the November 3, 2026 General Election, the Secretary of State shall select polling locations and precincts to be counted.

- Three (3) Election Day polling locations and three (3) Early Voting locations or one (1) percent of the Election Day polling locations and one (1) percent of the Early Voting locations, whichever is greater, will be selected
- No more than three (3) offices or measures shall be designated for the count

Role of General Custodian In the Post-Election Hand Count Audit

General Custodian shall conduct a manual count of all races contained on the ballots by mail in at least:

- one (1) percent of the precincts in which a ballot by mail was cast and in which the ballot were counted using automatic tabulating equipment;
- **OR** in three (3) precincts, whichever is greater.

- Precincts shall be selected at random.

Selection of Polling Locations/Precincts - Random

The general custodian may select additional polling locations for early voting and election day and additional precincts for ballots by mail through a random selection process.

- The General Custodian should follow the guidelines used to randomly select polling locations and precincts for the initial Post-Election Hand Count Audit.
- These guidelines are discussed in more detail in the Post-Election Hand Count Audit Handbook.

Additional Selections

Keep it **RANDOM**



DRAW FROM A HAT

Keep it **SIMPLE**



DRAW FROM A BOX

Keep it **FAIR**



USE A PROGRAM

The method used is not important–**the process must be fair and random**

Selection of Polling Locations / Precincts - Turnout

The General Custodian may select additional polling locations for early voting and election day, or additional precincts for ballots by mail with the highest voter turnout.

- For voting by mail, the General Custodian may focus on precincts with the largest number of accepted ballots by mail.

Selection of Polling Locations / Precincts - Discrepancy

If reconciliation documentation indicates that a discrepancy exists between the number of votes cast at a polling location (or in a ballot by mail precinct) and the number of ballots counted, the General Custodian is authorized to add the precincts or polling locations to the Post-Election Hand Count Audit.

- The General Custodian must document the reason or reasons for adding the additional polling locations or precincts to the Post-Election Hand Count Audit.

Early Voting Ballot Board Role In the Post-Election Hand Count Audit

General custodian shall designate members of the early voting ballot board to perform the Post-Election Hand Count Audit.

If a member or members of the early voting ballot board are unable to serve, the general custodian may appoint other individuals to the Early Voting Ballot Board

Who can attend the Post-Election Hand Count Audit?

Each person entitled to appoint watchers in the election may attend

Each person may have one watcher present

- Each watcher must deliver a certificate of appointment to the presiding judge "at the time" the watcher reports for service
- Each watcher must satisfy the same requirements to be a watcher in Chapter 33 of the Texas Election Code

Video Surveillance of Post-Election Hand Count Audit

Counties with populations of 100,000+ must implement a video surveillance system of all areas containing voted ballots until the canvass of precinct election returns

In counties with the video surveillance requirement and counties that have voluntarily implemented video surveillance, this will mean that the Post-Election Hand Count Audit will be conducted under video surveillance if the Post-Election Hand Count Audit is conducted prior to the canvass

Relationship Between Risk-Limiting Audit & Post Election Hand Count Audit

RLA

✓Checks outcome of election

PECHA

✓Checks accuracy of tabulating equipment

Relationship Between Risk-Limiting Audit & Post Election Hand Count Audit

RLA

✓Randomly retrieve ballots

PECHA

✓Checking results from specific races and locations

Starting the Post-Election Hand Count Audit

Entities will receive a separate email after Election Day from SOS with information specific to the Post-Election Hand Count Audit.

Once notified, the general custodian of election records will post notice of the date, hour, and place of the count.

Starting the Post-Election Hand Count Audit - *continued*

The general custodian must begin the Post-Election Hand Count no later than the first business day after the Secretary of State has certified the completion of the RLA.

The Secretary of State will certify the deadline to complete the Post-Election Hand Count Audit **after the Risk-Limiting Audit is completed**

Results of the Post-Election Hand Count Audit **must be posted** on the county's website in the same location where election returns and results are posted.

Quiz 1 – Can the PEHCA be conducted before the RLA?

Yes

No

YES – If you have the time, resources, and staff to complete the PECHA before the RLA, then you may conduct the PEHCA before the RLA. If you don't think you'll be able to finish the PEHCA before November 19, then we recommend waiting until after the RLA is certified to begin your PEHCA

Opening the Ballot Box

You are not required to petition a district judge for permission to retrieve the ballots when conducting the Post-Election Hand Count Audit, since this is a procedure that is required by law.

- When you have designated to begin the Post-Election Hand Count Audit, you should arrange access to the ballots for the selected precincts.
- Before conducting the Post-Election Hand Count Audit, the general custodian of election records should coordinate with the Custodian of Keys to receive the keys to the ballot boxes, or to be present for the opening of the ballot boxes
- Following the Post-Election Hand Count Audit, all election material must be re-secured and returned to the appropriate authority.

Tex. Elec. Code §§ 66.058, 127.201

Preparation



Give Notification

Notify Stakeholders



Prepare Space

Workspace Setup



Gather Supplies

Organization



Prepare Records

Gather Election Data

Counting

Call, Hashmark, and Verify
3 members
• 1 Caller • 2 Talliers • Caller keeps a tally sheet • Caller announces every vote • Talliers record all votes



Overvotes and Undervotes **MUST** be tallied

Manual Sort and Stack
3 members
• 3 tally sheets • Cover sheet for each ballot stack • Baskets for candidates, overvotes, undervotes • Sort ballots into the correct baskets • Each team member counts each ballot stack • Record preliminary totals on the cover sheet • Caller announces every vote • Talliers and caller keep a tally sheet

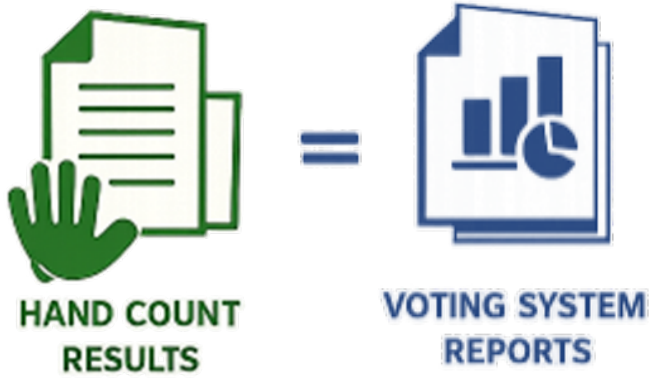
Comparing Results

REVIEW

Review for completion and accuracy

COMPARE

Compare the hand counted results to the voting system reports



NO DISCREPANCIES

Secure the ballots for the remainder of the preservation period

DISCREPANCIES FOUND

Determine the cause of the discrepancy

Voter Intent



If the voter's intent is clear, the vote should be counted

CLEAR INTENT–Count the Vote

Seabreeze County Judge

- ~~Surfer Dude~~
- ~~Sand Dune~~
- Sea Shell
- ~~Palm Tree~~

Seabreeze County Clerk

- ~~Star Fish~~
- Mermaid
- Tidal Wave
- Coral Reef

Valid vs. Invalid Ballots

A ballot is not counted in the Post-Election Hand Count Audit if:

- The intent of the voter cannot be determined for any races or propositions on the ballot.
- Two or more marked ballots are folded together in a manner indicating that they were folded together.
- The ballot is not numbered and the presiding judge determines that the ballot was not provided at the polling place.
- The ballot was never deposited in the ballot box.

Tex. Elec. Code §§ 65.009, 65.010

Replacing Counting Team Members

A member of the counting team should not be replaced after vote tallying has begun unless each existing discrepancy among the three tally lists is corrected before the replacement is made (Sec. 65.006(a)).

If a counting officer is replaced on a counting team after the tallying is begun, the officer to be replaced should certify the accuracy of the list the officer has kept, as of the time of replacement, by signing the list at that time (Sec. 65.006(b)).

Conducting the Post-Election Hand Count Audit for Countywide Polling Place Counties

For counties that are participating in the Countywide Polling Place Program, for the Election Day count, they will complete the Post-Election Hand Count Audit by polling place.

Early voting ballots now required to be counted by polling place in countywide counties. The selected polling places must be counted for early voting ballots cast in-person.

Conducting the Post-Election Hand Count Audit for Countywide Polling Place Counties - *continued*

At the convening of the Post-Election Hand Count Audit, the general custodian of election records shall identify the applicable ballot boxes containing voted ballots subject to the Post-Election Hand Count Audit

For the selected polling places, the general custodian of election records with at least one individual of the counting team shall inspect the ballot boxes to verify that all locks and seals are intact

Resolving Discrepancies

If there are discrepancies between the hand marked and the voting system reports, the general custodian of election records, in consultation with the Early Voting Ballot Board, must attempt to determine what caused the discrepancy.

When investigating a discrepancy, start with the hand counted ballots.

- Verify that the number of ballots in each batch of ballots matches the expected totals from the voting system count, and that no ballots were missed when retrieving ballots from their ballot boxes and that no ballot boxes were overlooked.
- Check that each stack of ballots is from the correct precinct or polling place, and sorted into the correct stacks for that precinct or polling place.
- Recount the pulled ballots to double check that the hand count is accurate.
- If any changes are being made to tally sheets, be sure to document what the change is and why it took place.

Resolving Discrepancies - *continued*

After the hand count has been reviewed, the general custodian of election records should ensure that the most current version of the results report is being used.

- Checking the cast vote records can also tell you how an individual ballot was counted by the voting system, but it may be a challenge to track down.

In counties with hand-marked ballots inserted into precinct scanners or central scanners, there may be some ballots interpreted by the voting system as an overvote or an undervote, but when viewed manually the voter's intent is clear.

If the discrepancy cannot be resolved, the general custodian of election records should document the discrepancy and any efforts to resolve it.

Resolving Discrepancies



Stay Calm



Verify Batches



Ballot Boxes



Recount Ballots



Different Method



Document Changes

Reason for Discrepancies Not Included

Assigned Race:	Mayor			
Election Day Polling Locations	**Candidate Name**	**Electronically Tabulated Results**	**Hand Count (Tally Sheet Total)**	**Discrepancy**
County Courthouse	John Johnson	32	32	0
	Robert Robertson	28	28	0
	Undervotes	0	0	0
	Overvotes	0	0	0
Local Library	John Johnson	40	40	0
	Robert Robertson	35	34	1
	Undervotes	0	1	-1
	Overvotes	0	0	0
Community Center	John Johnson	38	38	0
	Robert Robertson	40	40	0
	Undervotes	0	0	0
	Overvotes	0	0	0
Reason for Discrepancies:				

Completing the Post-Election Hand Count Audit

The Post-Election Hand Count Audit must be completed by either the 30th day after election day or on a date designated by the Secretary of State, whichever is later.

No later than the third day after the date the Post-Election Hand Count Audit is completed, the general custodian of election records shall deliver a written report of the results to the Secretary of State's Office.

Results of the Post-Election Hand Count Audit must also be posted on the county's website in the same location where election returns and results are posted.

Completing the Post-Election Hand Count Audit

If you are a local entity conducting your own election, and therefore your own Post-Election Hand Count Audit, you are still required to submit the results to the SOS and to the county to post on the county's website.

It is recommended that the local entity also post a link from its website to the county's website where the results are posted.

Use Your Post-Election Hand Count Audit Email as Reference

- **Submission of Results**
  To report your Post-Election Hand Count Audit results, please provide the following information to our office at elections@sos.texas.gov. Our office will review the submitted results and may reach out to your county for additional information or clarification, as needed.
  - Record of the manual counts and electronic results and explanation of discrepancies, if any (spreadsheets attached)
  - Certification of Completed Post-Election Hand Count Audit
  - A link to the results of the Post-Election Hand Count Audit which is posted on the county's website

What Should Your Submission Include?

- ✓ Record of the manual counts and electronic results and explanation of discrepancies, if any.
- ✓ Summary and certification of completed Post-Election Hand Count Audit.
- ✓ A link to the results of the Post-Election Hand Count Audit which is posted on the county's website.

Incomplete Excel Worksheets

Assigned Race:	Mayor			
Election Day Polling Locations	**Candidate Name**	**Electronically Tabulated Results**	**Hand Count (Tally Sheet Total)**	**Discrepancy**
County Courthouse	John Johnson	0	0	0
	Robert Robertson	0	0	0
	Undervotes	0	0	0
	Overvotes	0	0	0
Local Library	John Johnson	0	0	0
	Robert Robertson	0	0	0
	Undervotes	0	0	0
	Overvotes	0	0	0
Community Center	John Johnson	0	0	0
	Robert Robertson	0	0	0
	Undervotes	0	0	0
	Overvotes	0	0	0
Reason for Discrepancies:				

Early Voting | Election Day | Ballot by Mail

Public Information

Records of the Post-Election Hand Count Audit are publicly available, and must be retained for the standard 22-month period. When storing records, keep related Post-Election Hand Count Audit paperwork together in well-labeled boxes, separated from other election records.

Quiz 2 – Is the PEHCA a recount?

Yes

No

NO – the PEHCA is NOT a recount. Recounts are governed generally by Title 13 of the Election Code (Chapters 211-216). The PEHCA does not automatically trigger a recount. The PEHCA does not change the results of an election.

Available Support



WEBINARS



TRAINING



RESOURCES

elections@sos.texas.gov

800-252-VOTE • 512-463-5650

sos.texas.gov