

Voters who registered through DMV encountered Election Day problems

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When Katie Wyskiver went to vote Tuesday, her polling place in Lolo didn't have a record of her registration, which she believed she'd completed through the Division of Motor Vehicles.

Similar problems arose with other voters who thought they'd registered through the same agency, election officials told her. So even though Wyskiver had received a document in the mail telling her to vote in Lolo, she drove back to Missoula to vote at her old polling place at Lowell School.

"I find it egregious, irresponsible and unethical that the DMV has holes in this process that could allow for voter registration to be lost or unprocessed," Wyskiver said in an email to the Missoulian.

Multiple people reported similar trouble on Election Day, but officials from the Department of Justice and the Division of Motor Vehicles do not believe the problem is widespread, although they don't know for sure.

Brenda Nordlund, administrator of the Motor Vehicle Division, said human error occurs, and many people successfully register through the program.

"Do I feel horrible that a mistake can happen and somebody ended up in a circumstance where they had to stand in same-day registration (lines)? Absolutely," Nordlund said.

But she said many people have registered at "driver licensing exam stations." Just last month, 1,013 people registered that way, she said; in 2009 and 2010, the agency registered 28,198, a number that matches ones from the Montana Secretary of State Office, according to Nordlund.

"If they've got the number and we've got the number, they're successful," she said. "They're on the system."

When people go get their driver's licenses because, say, they're 16 or move here from another state, they fill out a form. The bottom of the form asks if the person wants to register to vote.

If the person checks the yes box, the staff person who enters the license information into the computer system also marks a field that says the person wants to register to vote. And that check sends a message to print out the voter registration form.

"Generally speaking, then, they give that form to us, and then we are responsible for getting that to a local election official," Nordlund said.

But multiple errors can take place. The staff person entering data into the computer may miss