County Election Offices across Nebraska are getting a lot of requests for early ballots. In Nebraska's three largest counties: Lancaster, Sarpy and Douglas, foot traffic has also been steady as people vote in-person.

"Over 17,000 Sarpy County voters have already requested an early ballot be sent to them or have voted in the office," said Election Commissioner Wayne Bena. "This shatters all previous records for this early in the election season."

Requests have also been heavy in Lancaster County, nearing the 20,000 mark. "Four years ago we had a total of a little over 30,000 early vote ballots," explained Lancaster County Election Commissioner Dave Shively. "I'm sure we will well exceed that number this year with just about two weeks left to go."

In Douglas County, 3,676 people have voted in person. More than 54,774 requests have been submitted for ballots and of those, more than 20,000 have been returned. County Election Commissioner Dave Phipps said this already exceeds early voting requests and response during the 2008 general election and he believes it will only grow in the weeks to come. "We expect early voting to account for a fairly large percentage of the vote for this election. In 2008, approximately 27 percent of all Douglas County voters voted early. This year, we expect that number to be somewhere between 35 percent and 40 percent of the total vote," said Phipps.

Other counties are also experiencing something of a "boom" when it comes to early voting requests. "I've got three computers going, and could literally use three more to process all the requests we're receiving. We've been getting about 500 a day since it started," said Hall County Election Commissioner Dale Baker.

The Lincoln County Election Commissioner said her office has also sent out 2,000 ballots since early voting started on Oct. 1. The first week was the busiest her office has ever had.

In reaction to the enormous response Secretary of State John Gale said, "A surge in early voting signals a probable high turnout for our Nov. 6 election. While convenience is a factor, early voting shows people have been paying attention and are ready to vote." He reminded those who wish to cast their ballots early, there are deadlines approaching:

• Registered voters can make requests until 4 p.m. Oct. 31 for early voting ballots to be mailed. Nov. 5 is the deadline for in-person early voting at county election offices for registered voters.

• The close of polls on Nov. 6 is the deadline for the return of early voting ballots to county election offices, including ballots returned by mail.

• "Don't waste your ballot. Early voting in person or by mail should be done well ahead of deadlines to make sure your ballot gets cast and counted," advised Gale.

"Early voting mail-in ballots have been shown to have as high as a four percent rejection rate when envelopes aren't signed, or signed by someone else, or sent in a wrong envelope, or returned due to no postage. So, follow the simple rules, get it done right, and make your ballot count. "

Nebraska's three largest counties also utilize drop boxes, to make early voting more convenient. In Lancaster and Sarpy counties, they are located outside the Election Commission offices. Douglas County has five. Three of those sites are at local libraries.

Phipps added that in Douglas County, early voting is popular, and continues to be even more so with each passing election. "After people vote early once, they seem to be more likely to do so again in the future. It's easy and convenient for voters who don't want to worry about problems such as a busy work schedule, sick children, or being out of town on Election Day."

Requests for early voting ballots can be found on the Secretary of State's website www.sos.state.ne.gov). Look under 'Elections' for 'Voter Forms'.