

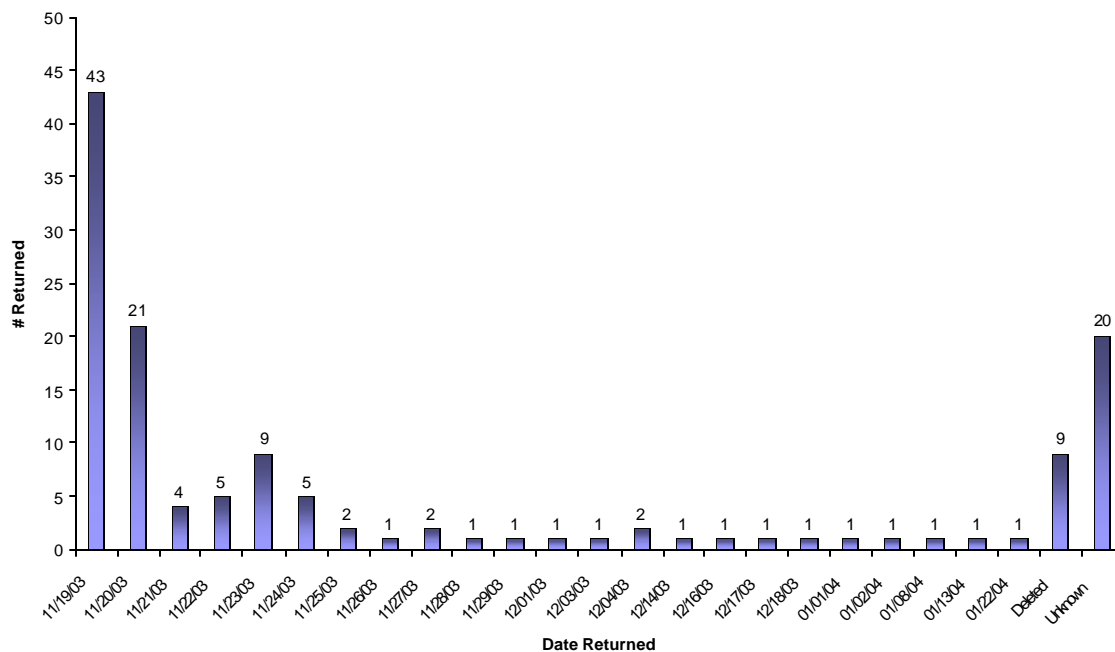
TIMELINESS OF E-MAIL RETURN RECEIPT RESPONSES

After the Legislative Management Committee meeting on November 18, 2003, Senator Stenehjem requested the Legislative Council staff determine the timeliness of legislators' responses to e-mail messages. On November 19, 2003, the following message was sent to the 137 legislators who have state-provided notebook computers:

When you open this e-mail, you will initiate a return receipt e-mail message to [Maryann F. Trauger]. This test is to determine the timeliness of the return receipt e-mail. You need take no further action. In fact, you can now delete this e-mail message.

When the e-mail messages were opened, return receipts automatically were sent to me. On the first day the message was sent, 43 return receipts were received. On the following day, 21 return receipts were received. From November 21 through November 24, there were 4 to 9 each day. From November 25 through January 22, there was

Email Return Receipts



an average of one or two a day almost every day. See the following graph:
Nine e-mail messages were deleted without being opened and 20 have not been opened.

Of the 20 return receipts that were not returned, the reason is unknown. Some legislators find connection speeds so slow they only review e-mail messages when they can connect to the state network in the chambers. Others only process e-mail on an intermittent basis.

INTERMITTENT USE OF E-MAIL

Information Technology Department staff has suggested that a legislator who is an intermittent user inform those sending that legislator messages that the legislator may not respond immediately by using the "Out of Office" feature of the Lotus Notes e-mail system. Information Technology Department staff also has suggested that the department could explore the possibility of systematically purging messages for those legislators who are infrequent e-mail users.

While legislators are informed of the "Out of Office" feature during training, it is possible that they do not choose to use it. A legislator may prefer not informing everyone sending that legislator an e-mail message that it will not be

answered for an extended period of time, especially if there is no alternate e-mail address to which senders could be referred.

A regular purging of e-mail messages by anyone other than the legislator would not allow a legislator to make a personal decision regarding e-mail messages. A legislator can deal with large amounts of e-mail, without processing every individual message, by selecting "all documents", clicking the delete button, and pressing F9.

A suggestion to temporarily remove a legislator's e-mail address from the legislative branch home page does not recognize the fact that mailing lists containing their addresses may have been developed by other users. In addition, removing a legislator's name from the state address book would require manual reactivation whenever the legislator wanted to receive e-mail.

The 20 legislators who did not open the e-mail message were part of that particular snapshot in time and may otherwise use e-mail on a regular basis.

E-MAIL USAGE

Rather than arbitrary deletion of legislators' e-mail messages by Information Technology Department or Legislative Council staff or adding, then removing, then adding, then removing a legislator's e-mail address throughout the term of office of the legislator, legislators should continue to have control over their e-mail. Legislative Council staff should continue to provide training legislators in the use of the "Out of Office" feature of Lotus Notes e-mail. To encourage the "Out of Office" use, Legislative Council staff should provide legislators with written "Out of Office" instructions by e-mail and a paper copy by mail.