UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE™

We deliver.

Consumer's Guide

To Postal Services & Products

Contributed By Mike Ludeman
Downloaded from StampSmarter.com

The Best Possible Mail Service

The employees of the U.S. Postal Service are committed to delivering the best possible mail service to you — our customer.

To meet the changing needs of American mailers over the past 200 years, we continue to improve our products and services.

As this guide shows, there is more to the Postal Service than stamps. Knowing about the various products and service options the Postal Service offers can help you choose the right service to meet your needs and save you time and money.

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Getting Mail to You

Our mission is to provide you with quality mail service. Our responsibility is to deliver this service as efficiently as possible. Mail is delivered to our customers in a variety of ways. How mail is delivered to you depends on where you reside. Some of the common delivery methods are described below.

City and Rural Delivery

City and rural delivery services are provided from more than 25,000 delivery post offices across the nation. Generally, for rural delivery to be established, roads must be passable year-round, and mailboxes must be on the right-hand side of the road on the carrier's line of travel. Extensions of rural delivery service must serve at least one family for each additional mile of carrier travel.

Areas to be served by city delivery must have paved or improved streets; street signs and house numbers displayed; and 50 percent of the building lots developed with residences or other structures. For more information, contact your local post office.

Central Point Delivery

Central point delivery provides service to several addresses at one delivery point. This service, along with curbline delivery service, is one of two service options offered for new residential areas.

Neighborhood delivery and collection box units (NDCBUs) and cluster box units

(CBUs) are examples of central point delivery service. The conveniently located units provide for the delivery and collection of mail. The delivery compartments are individually locked and large enough to hold magazines, merchandise samples, and several days' accumulation of mail. Outgoing mail may be deposited in a designated compartment. In many areas, parcel lockers are installed alongside NDCBUs to save the customer trips to the post office to pick up packages. With this service, customers enjoy greater mail security and convenience.

Curbline Delivery

Curbline delivery provides service to customer boxes located at the edge of streets and roads that can be safely and conveniently served by carriers from their vehicles. If unusual conditions, such as excessive street parking, make it impractical or difficult to serve boxes at the curb, customers may install boxes at the edge of the sidewalk closest to their homes. These boxes can then be served from the sidewalk by the carrier. The local post office makes this determination after all other delivery options, including central point delivery, have been explored.

General Delivery

General delivery is used primarily at post offices without carrier delivery or those serving transients and other customers who do not have a permanent mailing address. Mail endorsed "General Delivery" is placed in a general delivery case. The mail can be picked up by the addressee on request at a retail window. Proper identification is required. In offices with carrier delivery, customers ineligible for carrier delivery may also receive their mail through general delivery. Contact your local postmaster for more information.

Mail Forwarding

Before you move, obtain a *Mover's Guide* from your letter carrier, local post office, or the Postal Service web site on the Internet at http://www.usps.gov/moversnet. Complete Form 3575, *Change of Address Order,* and deposit it with your local post office. Whenever possible, notify your post office at least 1 month before you move to ensure uninterrupted service. Be sure to notify your correspondents also.

You must include the effective date of the change on all notification forms. Your complete new address should include any directional designation (north, east, south, west); the correct suffix (ST, AVE, RD, etc.); apartment number, rural route number, box number; and correct ZIP Code or ZIP+4 code (if known).

All Express Mail, Priority Mail, and First-Class Mail such as cards and letters are forwarded for 1 year. There is no charge for this service.

Periodicals mail, including magazines and newspapers, is forwarded at no charge for 60 days from the effective date of your change of address order. Publishers are required to subscribe to our address

correction service. Normally, your magazines will not need to be forwarded for longer than 60 days. This applies to permanent moves only. Publishers are not provided address correction information for temporary moves. So, if you file a temporary change of address and would like to receive your newspapers and magazines at your temporary address, you need to notify publishers in advance of your move and again before you return.

If you go away for less than 30 days, you may want to use our hold mail service. Your local post office can provide additional information and guidance regarding temporary changes of address and holding mail.

Forwarding of Standard Mail varies greatly depending on the level of service guaranteed by the sender. Contact your post office for more information about forwarding this class of mail.

Post Office Box and Caller Service

Post office box service is available at most post offices for a small semiannual or annual fee. At nondelivery post offices or based on a customer's eligibility for carrier delivery service, a no-fee post office box may be available. If your post office does not offer carrier delivery service, check with your local postmaster to see if you are eligible for a no-fee post office box.

There are five post office box sizes from which to choose. The fee varies with the size of the post office box and the classification category of the post office. Post office box delivery is a secure

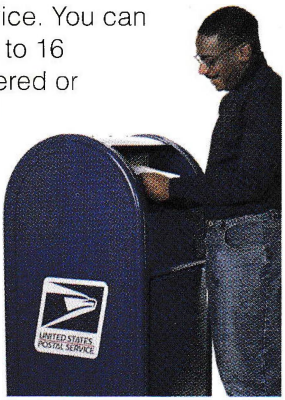
and private means of getting your mail any time the post office lobby is open. With post offices conveniently located near most businesses, you can get a jump on your day by receiving your mail at a post office box near where you work. **Note:** All five post office box sizes may not be available at all post offices.

Caller service is available for customers who receive a large volume of mail or who need a box number address when no boxes are available. This service is available for a fee. Call your post office for more information.

Getting Mail to Us

When you have a letter or package to mail, there are literally thousands of ways to get it to us. There are over 40,000 post offices around the country where you can deposit your mail. We have over 292,000 regular and 26,000 Express Mail collection boxes.

If you live on a rural route, you can buy stamps from your rural carrier to place on your letters, which you can then put in your roadside box. Raise the flag and your carrier will pick up your mail and carry it to the post office. You can also mail parcels (up to 16 ounces), send registered or certified mail, insure your packages, or buy almost any other postal product or service through your rural carrier. Contact your local post office or talk to your rural carrier for more information.



If you receive curbline delivery service from a city letter carrier, you can place postage-affixed mail in your mailbox. Raise the flag and your carrier will collect it regardless of whether there is any mail to be delivered to you. In residential areas with door delivery, carriers will pick up mail only when making deliveries.

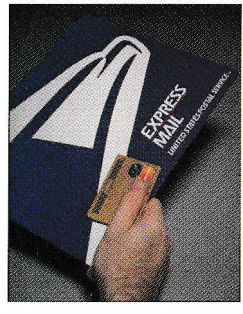
For a small fee, we will make a special trip to you to pick up as many prepaid Express Mail and Priority Mail packages as you have to mail (and we will include any other pieces of mail that you wish to deposit as long as they fit in the vehicle). Just call 1-800-222-1811 to schedule a pickup.

Express Mail

Express Mail is our fastest service. It offers guaranteed delivery service 365 days a year, including weekends and holidays. We also offer Express Mail International Service to nearly 175 countries and territories, and we are the only company to offer Express Mail Military Service at domestic prices to select APO and FPO addresses.

Important letters, documents, and merchandise may be sent Express Mail. A full postage refund is made for all domestic shipments delivered later than the guaranteed commitment for that particular service.

To use Express Mail Next Day Service, you can take your shipment to any designated Express Mail post office, generally by 5 p.m.; deposit it in an Express Mail collection box; call for on-demand pickup; or hand it to your letter carrier. Your local post office can give you specific Express Mail acceptance times for your area. Depending upon the destination, your mailing will be delivered to the addressee either by noon or by 3 p.m. the next day. Express Mail post office-to-post office service can also be picked up at the destination post office by 10 a.m. the next day.



If you require expedited delivery but are not sure that your correspondents will be physically at the delivery address to accept and sign for the mail, you may exercise the *Waiver of Signature* option at the time of mailing. We may not be able to reach some destinations overnight and, in this case, we provide guaranteed second day delivery

service. You can get on-demand pickup and information on the delivery status of your mailing by calling 1-800-222-1811.

Express Mail is convenient to use. We supply you with mailing containers (envelopes, boxes, and tubes) and the necessary mailing labels at no charge. Customers find our 2-pound flat rate envelope convenient to use. Any amount of material that fits into it may be mailed in this special flat rate envelope. The rate of postage is the rate charged for a 2-pound piece of Express Mail, regardless of the weight of the material in the envelope.

Merchandise is automatically insured up to $500 against loss or damage, and, for a nominal fee, additional insurance can be purchased up to $5,000. The *Waiver of Signature* option cannot be used when additional insurance above $500 is purchased. Compensation for loss of negotiable items such as currency or bullion is limited to $15. Document reconstruction insurance is also available. Payment can be considered for reasonable costs incurred to reconstruct an exact duplicate of a lost or damaged nonnegotiable document. As with all claims, there are specific procedures, time limits, and qualifying conditions to be followed. Contact your local post office or your local Postal Service Consumer Affairs and Claims Office for more information.

Express Mail services also include Express Mail Custom Designed Service, Express Mail International Service, Express Mail Military Service, and Express Mail Drop Shipment and Reshipment Services. You can pay for Express Mail with stamps or postage meter strips, or through an Express Mail Corporate Account. Also, in some cities, credit and debit cards may be used. Contact your post office for details and rate information.

Priority Mail

When the overnight speed of Express Mail is not needed but preferential handling is desired, use Priority Mail. Priority Mail offers expedited delivery at the least expensive rate ($3.00 up to 2 pounds) in the industry. The maximum weight for Priority Mail is 70 pounds, and the maximum size is 108 inches in length and girth combined. You also have the option of sending mail weighing less than 11 ounces as Priority Mail.

For proper handling, Priority Mail should be well identified. Your local post office will provide Priority Mail stickers, labels, envelopes, and boxes at no extra charge. For larger quantities (usually 50), you can also order over the phone (1-800-222-1811) or via the Internet (www.usps.gov). You will find our special flat rate envelope convenient to use. Any amount of material that fits into the envelope may be mailed for $3.00 (the regular 2 pound rate) regardless of the weight of the material in the flat-rate envelope.

A presort discount is available for large mailings. Priority Mail Drop Ship or Reship service is also available. Check with your local Postal Business Center for more information on these special services. Priority Mail can be insured, registered, certified, or sent COD for an additional charge. Contact your local post office for more information.

First-Class Mail

Use First-Class Mail for sending letters, postcards, stamped cards, greeting cards, personal notes, checks, and money orders. All mail weighing over 11 ounces sent as First-Class Mail will be handled as Priority Mail.

Additional services such as certificates of mailing and certified, registered, COD, and restricted delivery can be purchased for First-Class Mail. Insurance can also be purchased. However, insured articles mailed at the First-Class Mail rate must contain only merchandise or material not required to be sent as First-Class Mail.

All First-Class Mail receives prompt handling and transportation. If your First-Class Mail is not letter-size, make sure to mark it "First-Class" or use a large green-diamond-bordered First-Class Mail envelope. First-Class Mail is generally delivered overnight to locally designated cities and within 2 days to locally designated states. Delivery by the third day can be expected for remaining outlying areas.

Periodicals

Only publishers and registered news agents approved for Periodicals mailing privileges may mail at the Periodicals rates of postage. Other rates such as First-Class Mail or Standard Mail (A) must be paid for magazines and newspapers mailed by the general public. Call or visit your post office for more information.

Standard Mail (A)

Standard Mail (A) is used primarily by retailers, catalogers, and other advertisers to promote their products and services. Advertising by mail allows advertisers to reach existing customers or to target new customers by sending messages to

specific neighborhoods or to certain demographic groups that are likely to be interested in their products. Standard Mail (A) also allows advertisers to convey a significant amount of information about their products and to measure the effectiveness of their advertisements. Churches and other eligible nonprofit organizations may apply to take advantage of the attractive nonprofit rates for their large mailings.

The minimum volume needed for using either the Standard Mail (A) rates or the Nonprofit Standard Mail rate is 200 pieces or 50 pounds per mailing. The pieces must each weigh less than 16 ounces and be prepared in a manner that allows for efficient handling. Standard Mail (A) also includes rates that anyone may use to send individual parcels weighing less than 1 pound. *If faster service is needed, use First-Class Mail, Priority Mail, or Express Mail.*

Most people enjoy receiving information in the mail about subjects that interest them, or products and services they may need or want. Some consumers, however, would like to receive less advertising mail at home. Mail Preference Service (MPS), a service of the Direct Marketing Association, is designed to assist in decreasing the amount of national nonprofit or commercial mail you receive. You may register with the name removal file by writing to:

MAIL PREFERENCE SERVICE
DIRECT MARKETING ASSOCIATION
PO BOX 9008
FARMINGDALE NY 11735-9008

Registering with the MPS will not eliminate all advertising mail. You will continue to receive mail from those companies with which you do business on a

regular basis, and from charitable and commercial organizations that are not subscribers of MPS. You should inform your favorite mail order companies to keep your name and address on their "in-house" list only. Registering with the MPS reduces unwanted advertising mail addressed with your name and address. Advertising mail addressed to "RESIDENT" or "OCCUPANT" usually does not stop.

Standard Mail (B)

Use Standard Mail (B) service for parcels weighing 1 pound or more. If you enclose or attach First-Class Mail, you must usually pay additional postage for the enclosure or attachment. (Ask your postmaster about incidental First-Class Mail attachments or enclosures that do not require separate payment of First-Class Mail postage.) You can purchase insurance to cover the value of articles mailed as Standard Mail (B). (For details, see **Insurance**.) Parcels mailed within the continental United States may weigh up to 70 pounds and measure up to 108 inches in length and girth combined. Your post office also has information about lower local mailing rates and special mailing rates for books, catalogs, and international mailings.

Our delivery goal for parcel delivery is 2 to 9 days, depending on distance. *For faster delivery of parcels, use Priority Mail or Express Mail.*

Getting Mail From Abroad (Customs)

All mail originating in foreign countries and U.S. overseas territories, other than the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, is subject to U.S. Customs Service examination upon entering the United States. Many imported goods are subject to the payment of U.S. Customs duty. When dutiable merchandise enters the United States by mail, the amount due is determined by the Customs Service, but is collected by the Postal Service. When the duty is collected on behalf of the Customs Service, the Postal Service also collects a customs clearance and delivery fee on each dutiable item. This fee offsets the cost of collection and remittance.

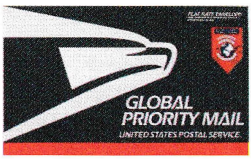
For customs information, write to:

UNITED STATES CUSTOMS SERVICE
TREASURY DEPARTMENT
1301 CONSTITUTION AVE NW
WASHINGTON DC 20229-0001

Sending Mail Abroad

The principal classes of international mail are as follows:

- Express Mail International Service (EMS) — for mailing high-priority or other urgently needed items, including merchandise, which can be sent to nearly 200 countries and territories around the world. The delivery target is 2 to 3 days.
- Global Priority Mail — for mailing urgent items weighing up to 4 pounds, including merchandise, which can be sent to more than 30 countries around the world.



- Aerogrammes — air letter sheets that can be folded and sealed to form an envelope.
- Letters, Postcards, and Letter Packages — personal handwritten or typewritten communications, as well as other items that are paid for at letter class rates.
- Printed Matter — includes books, sheet music, publishers' periodicals, and regular printed matter (i.e., advertising mail, catalogs, and directories).
- Small Packets — for light-weight merchandise, commercial samples, or documents other than personal correspondence.
- Parcel Post — for shipping heavier merchandise and printed matter.

All printed matter items, small packets, and parcel post packages may be sent either airmail or surface mail. Check with your local post office for specific information about the mail service in the country to which you are mailing.

Customs

Customs forms are required when you send dutiable letter packages, small packets, printed matter, and parcels to international destinations. The specific customs form is governed by the type of mail, the weight of the item, and the regulations of the destinating country.

Individual countries may restrict or prohibit certain articles. Articles that are prohibited by the destinating country are nonmailable. Articles that are restricted are subject to the import requirements of that country. Specific information about restrictions and prohibitions for individual countries and about the forms required for mailing is listed in the *International Mail Manual,* available at your local post office.

For customs information, write to the U.S. Customs Service (see address on previous page).

Special Services

Registry service, with a very limited level of indemnity protection, is available for letter mail, small packets, and all printed matter. (For details, see **Registered Mail**.) Insured parcel post service is also available to many countries.

Recorded delivery service, like domestic certified mail service, is intended for letters, documents, and items of little or no value. It is an appropriate service if you want the assurance of knowing that a record of delivery exists in the event an inquiry is necessary. For an added fee, you can purchase a return receipt at the time of mailing.

Note: Publication 51, *International Postal Rates and Fees,* is available at all post offices. This booklet contains general mailing information and current postal rates and fees for postal services from the United States to foreign countries.

Parcels and Publications Sent to Military Bases

Parcel airlift (PAL) mail and space available mail (SAM) are only for personal parcels and publications mailed to military personnel overseas at the Standard Mail rates.

Packages up to 30 pounds and 60 inches in combined length and girth may be sent by PAL. This mail is flown to a military mail dispatch center where it is sent on a space available basis overseas by air transportation. You pay the regular parcel post rate, depending on weight, plus a small fee for the air service to the military mail dispatch center. Parcels of any class marked "SAM" that weigh up to 15 pounds and are not more than 60 inches in combined length and girth also are airlifted overseas on a space available basis to military post offices. However, this mail is transported by surface within the United States to a military mail dispatch center. There is no additional fee for space available mail.

Express Mail Military Service (EMMS) is available for sending urgent letters, documents, and packages to select overseas military APO and FPO addresses. We deliver to more than 300 military post offices. Postage for EMMS is the same as domestic Express Mail.

Addressing Your Mail for Delivery

It is important to use all address information for proper delivery of your mail. For example, today there are more than 40 streets in Atlanta, Georgia, with the name *Peachtree* — N Peachtree Ct, Peachtree St NW, W Peachtree St NE, and so on. Imagine trying to deliver a letter addressed only to Mrs. Smith on "Peachtree"! We would not know where to send it.

Destination Address

Be sure to include the following in the destination address:

- Recipient's name (and/or company name, if applicable).
- Recipient's street address, post office box number, rural route number and box number, or highway contract route number and box number. In addition, include all required suffixes, directionals, and locators (see **Addressing Tips**) in the address line.
- Recipient's city, state, and ZIP Code or ZIP+4, if known. For international mail, include the applicable foreign postal code, if known, city or town, province or state name, and country name (see **International Addressing Tips** for more details).

Return Address

Include all the elements of the destination address. Place the return address in the upper left corner of the mailpiece.

Dual Addressing

When a post office box number and a street address are used, make sure that the place where you want the mail delivered appears on the line immediately above the city, state, and ZIP Code line and that the

ZIP Code or ZIP+4 code corresponds to that address. For example:

Mail will be delivered here

GRAND PRODUCTS INC
475 L'ENFANT PLZ SW RM 123
▸ PO BOX 320
WASHINGTON DC 20260-6320
(ZIP+4 corresponds to post office box)

GRAND PRODUCTS INC
PO BOX 320
▸ 475 L'ENFANT PLZ SW RM 123
WASHINGTON DC 20260-0123
(ZIP+4 corresponds to street address)

Addressing Tips

- Write, type, or print the complete address neatly.
- Always use a return address.
- Always use complete address information, such as the suffixes AVE, BLVD, and ST. Always include locators such as the apartment or suite number.
- Always use correct directionals, such as N, W, and SW.
- Don't let an incorrect ZIP Code delay delivery of your mail. Local post offices and the Postal Service web site, www.usps.gov, offer ZIP Code information.
- Use the four-digit add-on, ZIP+4, in your addressing. Hyphenate the ZIP+4.
- Always use the two-letter state abbreviations listed in the chart in **Abbreviations**.
- Use common addressing abbreviations listed in the chart in **Abbreviations**.
- Place endorsements for special services, such as Priority Mail, First-Class Mail, or insured, above the

destination address and below and to the right of the return address.

International Addressing Tips

- Put foreign postal codes, if known, in front of the city or town name and on the same line.
- Place the city or town name and the province or state name on the next line after the street address information.
- Write the name of the foreign country in capital letters on the last line of the address.

Packaging Tips

- Select a box that is strong enough to protect the contents. Leave space for cushioning inside the carton.
- Cushion package contents with shredded or rolled newspaper, bubble wrap, or Styrofoam™ peanuts. Plain air-popped popcorn is also good for cushioning; it's inexpensive and environmentally friendly. Pack tightly to avoid shifting.
- Always use tape that is designed for shipping, such as pressure-sensitive tape, nylon-reinforced kraft paper tape, or glass-reinforced pressure-sensitive tape.
- Do not use wrapping paper, string, masking tape, or cellophane tape.
- Put the delivery and return addresses on one side only of the package.
- Suggestion: Place a return address label inside the package.
- Stuff glass and fragile hollow items, like vases, with newspaper

Changes in Costs and Services Since 1971

Item	1971	1997*
Name	Post Office Dept.	U.S. Postal Service
U.S. population	206.7 million	268.2 million
Pieces of mail per capita	421	712
Total mail volume	87 billion	190 billion
Public service subsidy	$844 million	$0
Total taxpayer subsidy	25 percent	0 percent
Delivery points (estimated)	75 million	130 million
Gallon of gas	36 cents	$1.13
McDonald's hamburger	20 cents	69 cents
Time magazine	50 cents	$2.95
Cost of First-Class stamp	8 cents	32 cents

*Postal data based on 1997 fiscal year figures (Sept. 1996–Sept. 1997)

the latest addressing information, and unique gifts.

- Avoid waiting in line for stamps by buying Stamps by Phone (1-800-STAMP24), Stamps by Mail, or stamps from postal self-service vending machines.
- If you are a last-minute international mailer, do not despair. The average Global Priority Mail delivery is 4 days to many countries for items up to 4 pounds. The average Express Mail International Service delivery is 1 or 2 days to most major cities.

Postal Facts

If the U.S. Postal Service were a private company, it would be the tenth largest in the country.

The Postal Service:

- Handles 41 percent of the world's mail volume, 630 million pieces every day. The next largest is Japan at 6 percent.
- Provides mail delivery 6 days a week and pickup for over 130 million households and businesses.
- Serves 7 million retail customers a day.
- Operates more than 38,000 post offices.
- Processes 38 million address changes each year.
- Delivers an average of 24 pieces of mail for every household every week.
- Owns the nation's largest compressed natural gas (CNG) delivery fleet, with 7,000 of its long-life vehicles converted. Electric and ethanol-powered vehicles are also being tested.
- Is the nation's largest civilian employer with more than 765,000 career employees.
- Delivers more mail in 1 day than FedEx does in a year and more mail in 3 days than UPS does in a year.
- Includes in our $4 billion transportation network 205,493 vehicles and contract space on approximately 15,000 of the daily 56,000 commercial airline flights. When the price of gasoline goes up one cent, the cost of gasoline for the Postal Service rises more than $1 million.

tape, nylon-reinforced kraft paper tape, or glass-reinforced pressure-sensitive tape.

- Do not use wrapping paper, string, masking tape, or cellophane tape.
- Put the delivery and return addresses on one side only of the package.
- Suggestion: Place a return address label inside the package.
- Stuff glass and fragile hollow items, like vases, with newspaper

Help Us Help You.

We will be happy to send you additional information on the products and services listed below or any other you may specify. Simply complete this card indicating the desired information and return it to us. Thank you.

- ☐ Express Mail
- ☐ Stamps by Mail Order Form
- ☐ Post Office Boxes
- ☐ First-Class Mail
- ☐ Certified Mail
- ☐ Indemnity Claims
- ☐ Proper Packaging
- ☐ Minimum Size Standards
- ☐ Passport
- ☐ Other_____
- ☐ Return Receipts
- ☐ Priority Mail
- ☐ Stamp Collecting
- ☐ International Mail
- ☐ Registered Mail
- ☐ Mail Fraud
- ☐ Money Orders
- ☐ Insurance
- ☐ Mail Order Problems

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY STATE

ZIP+4 CODE

Information which you provide will be protected and only disclosed in accordance with the Privacy Act of 1974.

the latest addressing information, and unique gifts.

- Avoid waiting in line for stamps by buying Stamps by Phone (1-800-STAMP24), Stamps by Mail, or stamps from postal self-service vending machines.
- If you are a last-minute international mailer, do not despair. The average Global Priority Mail delivery is 4 days to many countries for items up to 4 pounds. The average Express Mail International Service delivery is 1 or 2 days to most major cities.

UNITED STATES
POSTAL SERVICE

475 L'ENFANT PLAZA SW
WASHINGTON DC 20260-2202

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL

FIRST-CLASS MAIL PERMIT NO. 73026 WASHINGTON DC

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE

CONSUMER AFFAIRS
U S POSTAL HEADQUARTERS
475 L'ENFANT PLZ SW RM 5821
WASHINGTON DC 20277-3026

NO POSTAGE
NECESSARY
IF MAILED
IN THE
UNITED STATES

tape, nylon-reinforced kraft paper tape, or glass-reinforced pressure-sensitive tape.

- Do not use wrapping paper, string, masking tape, or cellophane tape.
- Put the delivery and return addresses on one side only of the package.
- Suggestion: Place a return address label inside the package.
- Stuff glass and fragile hollow items, like vases, with newspaper

or packing material to avoid damage due to shock. When mailing framed photographs, take the glass out of the frame and wrap it separately.

- Remove batteries from toys. Wrap and place them next to the toys in the mailing box.
- Take packages that weigh at least 1 pound into the post office for mailing.
- Publication 2, *Packaging for Mailing,* and Publication 227, *Preparing Packages for Mailing,* contain more tips and are available free from your post office.
- Obtain Express Mail and Priority Mail boxes, envelopes, and tubes for free from your post office.
- Purchase packaging products, including tape, envelopes, padded bags, corrugated boxes, mailing tubes, and cushioning material, from your post office. Some locations offer decorative boxes and expander packs that are suitable for mailing gifts.

Special Tips

- Access the Postal Service's web site, www.usps.gov, for postage calculations, the latest addressing information, and unique gifts.
- Avoid waiting in line for stamps by buying Stamps by Phone (1-800-STAMP24), Stamps by Mail, or stamps from postal self-service vending machines.
- If you are a last-minute international mailer, do not despair. The average Global Priority Mail delivery is 4 days to many countries for items up to 4 pounds. The average Express Mail International Service delivery is 1 or 2 days to most major cities.

ZIP Code

The ZIP Code is extremely important in the processing and delivery of mail. An envelope that does not include a ZIP Code in the delivery address must be manually sorted. This increases the cost of sorting the mail and causes mail to be delayed en route to the delivery address. Even though use of the ZIP Code is voluntary for most mail types, we urge you to include it in your return address and the mailing address. ZIP Code directories (Publication 65, *National Five-Digit ZIP Code and Post Office Directory*) are available for use or sale at your local post office.

ZIP+4

In 1983, the Postal Service began to use an expanded ZIP Code called ZIP+4. It is composed of the original five-digit code plus a four-digit add-on. Use of the four-digit add-on number is voluntary for most mail. However, this add-on number helps the Postal Service direct mail efficiently and accurately. Even if you prefer not to use your four-digit add-on number, using the correct five-digit ZIP Code helps prevent delays.

The four-digit add-on number identifies a geographic segment within the five-digit delivery area such as a city block, an office building, an individual high-volume receiver of mail, or any other unit that would aid efficient mail sorting and delivery. Using ZIP+4 reduces the number of handlings and significantly decreases the potential for human error and the possibility of misdelivery. You can purchase Publication 66, *ZIP+4 State Directory,* at your post office.

Minimum Size Standards

Pieces 1/4 inch thick or less are mailable if they are rectangular and:

- At least 3 1/2 inches high.
- At least 5 inches long (items sent to foreign countries must be at least 5 1/2 inches long).
- At least 0.007 inch thick (about the thickness of a postcard).

Mail not meeting these standards is returned to the sender.

Nonstandard Size Mail

Nonstandard size mail is more costly to handle because it usually cannot be mechanically processed. First-Class Mail, single-piece Standard Mail (A), and international letters are nonstandard if they weigh 1 ounce or less and they exceed any of these size limits:

- Height exceeds 6 1/8 inches, or
- Length exceeds 11 1/2 inches, or
- Thickness exceeds 1/4 inch, or
- Length divided by height is less than 1.3 or more than 2.5 inches.

A surcharge, in addition to the applicable postage and fees, is applied to each piece of nonstandard size mail for two reasons: it compensates the Postal Service for the added cost of manually handling nonstandard mail, and it promotes the design and use of mail that can be processed mechanically.

Certificate of Mailing

A certificate of mailing is a receipt showing evidence of mailing. It can be purchased only at the time of mailing. The certificate does not provide insurance coverage for loss or damage, nor does it provide proof of delivery. No record is kept at the mailing office, and a receipt is not obtained when mail is delivered to the addressee.

Certified Mail

Certified mail provides proof of mailing and delivery of mail. The sender receives a mailing receipt at the time of mailing, and a record of delivery is kept at the recipient's post office. A return receipt to provide the sender with proof of delivery can also be purchased for an additional fee. Certified mail service is available only for First-Class Mail or Priority Mail. Certified mail is not available for international mail, nor does it offer insurance protection. For valuables and irreplaceable items, use Express Mail or insured or registered mail.

Collect on Delivery (COD)

COD service is used when the mailer wants to collect payment for merchandise and/or postage when the merchandise is delivered. COD service can be used for merchandise sent by First-Class Mail, registered mail, Express Mail, Priority Mail, or Standard Mail. The addressee has the choice of paying for the COD at the time of

delivery either by cash or personal check, and the merchandise must have been ordered by the addressee.

Fees charged for this service include insurance protection against loss or damage. Insurance coverage is limited to $600. (For details, see **Insurance**.) This service is not available for international mail or for mail addressed to APO and FPO addresses.

Insurance

You can purchase insurance coverage up to $5,000 for Standard Mail as well as for Standard Mail matter mailed at the Priority Mail or First-Class Mail rate. For our most secure service, see **Registered Mail** for coverage up to $25,000. For articles insured for more than $50, a receipt of delivery is signed by the recipient and filed at the delivery post office.

You may purchase additional special services when you purchase insurance. For items insured for $50 or less, you may purchase special handling service. For items insured for more than $50, you may purchase restricted delivery, return receipt, or special handling services.

Do not insure your packages for more than their value. The amount of insurance coverage for loss will be the actual value, less depreciation. No claim payments are made for sentimental losses or for any expenses incurred as a result of the loss. (For information on Express Mail insurance, see **Express Mail**.)

Merchandise Return Service

Merchandise return service allows permit holders to pay the postage and fees for merchandise returned to them. The service enables the recipient to return a parcel and have the postage paid by the sender. Under this arrangement, the shipper provides a special label with instructions to attach it to the returning parcel. Apply this label to the parcel and deposit the parcel at a post office or, if it is under 16 ounces, place it in a mailbox. **Note:** Unless the preprinted merchandise return label is provided by the shipper, you must pay the required postage charges.

Registered Mail

Registered mail is the most secure service option offered by the Postal Service. It provides added protection for valuable and important mail. Registered articles are placed under tight security from the point of mailing to the point of delivery. First-Class Mail or Priority Mail postage is required on domestic registered mail. Return receipt and restricted delivery services are available for additional fees, and insurance up to $25,000 can be purchased on domestic registered mail at the mailer's option. Registered mail to Canada is subject to a $1,000 indemnity limit. For all other foreign countries, the indemnity limit is currently $42.30.

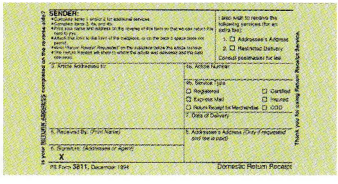
Restricted Delivery

Restricted delivery means that the sender's mail is delivered only to a specific addressee or to someone authorized in writing to receive mail for the addressee.

Restricted delivery mail addressed to officials of government agencies, members of the legislative and judicial branches of federal and state governments, members of the diplomatic corps, minors, and individuals under guardianship can be delivered to an agent without the addressee's written authorization. Restricted delivery is available only for registered mail, certified mail, COD mail, and mail insured for more than $50.

Return Receipt

This is the sender's proof of delivery. A return receipt can be purchased for mail sent COD, Express Mail, insured for more than $50, registered, or certified. The return receipt shows who signed for the item and the date that it was delivered. Unless prohibited by law, the return receipt also provides the delivery address if the address on the mailpiece is no longer correct. Return receipt service can be purchased in conjunction with restricted delivery service. It can also be requested before or after mailing, except for return receipt for merchandise service.


SENDER:
Article Addressed to:
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Service Type
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Certified
Express Mail
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Return Receipt for Merchandise
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Date of Delivery
Received By: (Print Name)
Addressee's Address (Only if requested and fee is paid)
Signature: (Addressee or Agent)
X
PS Form 3811, December 1994
Domestic Return Receipt

Return Receipt for Merchandise

This form of return receipt service provides a mailing receipt, return receipt, and record of delivery. It is available only for merchandise sent at the First-Class Mail, Priority Mail, and Standard Mail postage rates. **Note:** This service does not include insurance, which may be purchased separately.

Special Handling

Special handling service is required for parcels whose unusual contents require additional care in transit and handling. **Note:** Special handling is not required for those parcels sent by First-Class Mail, Express Mail, or Priority Mail. Examples of such contents include live poultry or bees. Special handling is available for Standard Mail only, including insured and COD mail. This service provides preferential handling to the extent practical in dispatch and transportation.

Special handling service is *not* necessary for sending ordinary parcels even when they contain fragile items. Breakable items will receive adequate protection if they are packed with sufficient cushioning and clearly marked "FRAGILE." Use registered mail for valuable or irreplaceable items.

Special Service Endorsements

All endorsements for special services should be placed above the delivery address and below and to the right of the return address on all articles. This requirement applies to endorsements for registered, insured, certified, COD, and return receipt for merchandise services, as well as endorsements for special handling, restricted delivery, and return receipt services.

Benefiting From Other Customer Services

Cash Receipt

If you need proof of payment for postage and other services, ask the postal clerk for a *cash receipt.*

Credit and Debit Cards

For customer convenience, we accept credit and debit cards for retail transactions at all post offices. Visa, MasterCard, Discover, and American Express credit cards can be used to purchase all postal products and services except CODs, meter settings, and money orders. Contact your local post office to find out which debit cards are currently accepted in your area.

Stamp Services

The Postal Service has made it more convenient than ever to buy stamps. Whether you use one of our shop-at-home services or buy stamps where you work or shop, you have these options:

At Retail Establishments — Look for the STAMPS TO GO logo at places where you shop. In cooperation with the Postal Service, many businesses offer stamps at post office prices. Ask the cashier at your local grocery or convenience store if that store is a STAMPS TO GO outlet.

Stamps by Mail — You can buy stamps, stamped cards, and stamped envelopes through the mail by completing Form 3227, *Stamps by Mail,* available at your post office or from your letter carrier.

Just fill out the order form, enclose a check or money order, and return the envelope to the carrier or drop it in a collection box. There is no service charge, and you should *receive your order within 3 to 5 business* days.

Stamps by Phone — Stamps are as close as your telephone. Call our toll-free number 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to place your order. Visa, MasterCard, American Express, and Discover credit cards are accepted. Your stamps are delivered within 3 to 5 business days. Call: 1-800-STAMP24 (1-800-782-6724). No minimum order is required, but there is a service charge based on the total cost of the order.

Self-Service Vending Equipment — Self-service vending equipment providing stamps and stamped products such as stamped cards and stamped envelopes is available at many locations throughout the country. The conveniently located equipment enables you to access basic postal services around the clock. Some locations include postal scales that provide rate information for mailing packages. Selected self-service vending machines can accept currency up to $20 bills and dispense a variety of products such as 100-stamp coils, Express Mail stamps, envelopes, stamp booklets, and even stamped cards — all at face value. If you experience a loss because of an equipment malfunction, you will be reimbursed upon request at the local post office or by completing a consumer service card.

Information on the Internet

A wealth of information is available at your fingertips when you visit the Postal Service web site on the Internet at http://www.usps.gov. You can look up ZIP+4 codes, track your Express Mail, get information on the latest postal rates, and find

answers to frequently asked questions. If you are interested in stamps and stamp collecting, you will find information on stamps and stamp releases and can view *images of the recent stamp issues. If you* keep exploring, you can find postal news releases and learn about the history of the Postal Service. The Inspection Service has included information on consumer fraud and other crimes, and information about the history of the Inspection Service. The web site is continually changing. Visit often for new postal information. You also have an opportunity via the web to make inquiries and request additional information.

Mailgram™

Mailgram, an electronic message service offered by Western Union, provides next day Postal Service delivery for messages sent to any address in the United States. The messages are transmitted for delivery with the next business day's mail. Mailgram service is also available for Canadian addresses.

You can send Mailgram messages by calling Western Union and dictating your message to the operator; or you can use your office Telex or TWX. For more information, call Western Union Telegraph Company. In Hawaii, call your local post office for information on how to send a message. In Alaska, call Alascom, Inc., for Mailgram service.

Money Orders

You should never send cash through the mail. Postal money orders are a safe way to send money. The special color blend, Benjamin Franklin watermark, metal security thread, and double imprinting of the dollar amount are incorporated security features. You can buy domestic and international money orders at all post offices in

amounts up to $700. You can purchase multiple money orders at one time in the same or different amounts. There is a $10,000 daily purchase limit, and customers who purchase more than $3,000 in money orders in a single day are required by federal law to complete Form 8105-A, *Funds Transactions/ Transfer Report.* Military money orders can be purchased only on U.S. military ships and foreign bases.

If your money order is lost or stolen, you must present your customer receipt to apply for a replacement. For a small fee, you can obtain a copy of a paid money order up to 2 years after the date that it is paid.

Passport Applications

You can apply for a passport at more than 1,200 postal facilities nationwide. When you apply for a new passport, Department of State regulations require that you present two recent 2" x 2" photographs, valid identification, and a certified copy of your birth certificate, along with the appropriate fee. The passport fee may be paid in cash, by check, or with a money order. For more information, call the Department of State information line nearest you.

Personal Checks

Except for the purchase of money orders, you may use personal checks at most post offices to pay for postal services and products up to the amount of purchase. You must show two forms

of identification, one of which must bear a photograph. Make your check payable to "U.S. Postal Service" or "Postmaster."

Postage Meters

When a mailer uses a postage meter, the postage, place of mailing, and date are imprinted at the mailer's place of business. Many mailers, including those mailing a relatively small volume of mail, have found that this convenience more than offsets the costs of maintaining an account and leasing the machine. Call your post office or your meter manufacturer for more information.

Stamp Collecting

Stamp collecting is a fascinating and enjoyable hobby that does not require specific skills or expensive equipment. Almost any subject of interest is shown on stamps.

A good place to begin your collection is your local post office, where new and recently issued stamps and postal stationery are on sale. You can also buy philatelic products, such as stamp collecting kits, the *Postal Service Guide to U.S. Stamps*, and mint sets of commemorative and special stamps for recent years. For a free mail order catalog of philatelic products, write to:

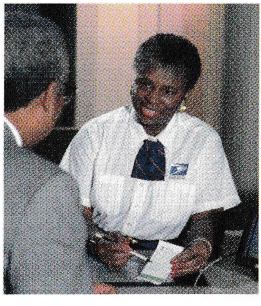
STAMP FULFILLMENT SERVICES
US POSTAL SERVICE
PO BOX 419424
KANSAS CITY MO 64179-0997

Claims

If your insured, registered, COD, or Express Mail article is lost or damaged, you can file a claim for indemnity. Claim forms can be picked up at your local post office. You must present the packaging, mailing container, and the article(s) (if received) to the Postal Service for inspection when filing a claim for missing or damaged contents. When filing a claim, you will also need to provide certain documents such as the original mailing receipt and evidence of value. Specific procedures that must be followed can be explained to you by your local post office. Also, you can get a copy of Publication 122, *Customer Guide to Filing Domestic Claims or Registered Mail Inquiries*, and Publication 122-A, *Customer Guide to Filing Inquiries and Claims on International Mail*, from your post office.

Complaints and Suggestions

Employees of the Postal Service try to provide accurate and efficient service 100 percent of the time. When we fail in our mission and you need to speak to someone about it, or if you have a suggestion to improve service, contact your local post office. If you choose, you may complete a consumer service card available in your local post office lobby.



You can also contact the Postal Service Consumer Affairs and Claims Office in your area to help resolve problems or obtain information that your local postmaster may be unable to provide to you.

The telephone number for your local Consumer Affairs and Claims Office is listed in the telephone book with other Postal Service telephone numbers.

The Consumer Advocate represents consumers to top management in the Postal Service. The Consumer Advocate collects and reviews customer satisfaction, service performance, and problem data. This information is used by the highest levels of management within the Postal Service to initiate changes in policies and operating procedures. Inquiries about this function may be addressed to:

CONSUMER ADVOCATE
US POSTAL SERVICE
475 L'ENFANT PLZ SW RM 5821
WASHINGTON DC 20260-2200

Many post offices have established Customer Advisory Councils to provide a forum for customers to present ideas, concerns, and suggestions about postal services to local postal managers. Input and suggestions from Customer Advisory Council members have resulted in improved customer service and communication to the community in many locations. Council membership is voluntary. For more information and to find out if a Customer Advisory Council has been established in your area, contact your local post office.

Inquiries

You may inquire about domestic mail at any post office. Form 1000, *Domestic Claim or Registered Mail Inquiry,* is used to report lost or damaged mail that was insured, registered, or sent by Express Mail. Form 1510, *Mail Loss/Rifling Report,* is used for ordinary and certified mail. You may use Form 3811-A, *Domestic Return Receipt (After Mailing),* to request a

duplicate return receipt if, for some reason, the original return receipt has not been returned to you. Your local post office can help you decide when it is appropriate to file a report and assist you in completing these forms.

Mail Fraud and Mail Order Problems

You can save time and money by ordering merchandise and conducting business through the mail. However, if you are not aware of a company's reputation, you may check with the Better Business Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, or state or local consumer protection office before placing an order. If you later experience difficulty with the company or suspect that you have been the victim of fraud, contact your local postal inspector or complete Form 8165, *Mail Fraud Complaint Questionnaire,* which is available at all post offices. Return the completed form to the postmaster or mail to the following address:

CHIEF POSTAL INSPECTOR
US POSTAL SERVICE
475 L'ENFANT PLZ SW RM 3021
WASHINGTON DC 20260-2100

Information pamphlets on mail fraud are available at your local post office.

The Postal Inspection Service is the law enforcement and investigative arm of the Postal Service. You can report postal crimes such as mail theft, drugs in the mail, or mail fraud to the local postmaster or nearest office of the postal inspector.

Pornographic and Undesirable Mail

Certain unsolicited or undesirable mail is prohibited from the mailstream. This includes obscene materials, violence-inciting materials, and some types of mail relating to lotteries.

You can place your name and those of your minor children on a list of persons who do not want to receive unsolicited sexually oriented advertisements through the mail. Just ask for Form 1500, *Application for Listing and/or Prohibitory Order,* at your local post office. After completing the form, you may submit it to any postal manager or mail it directly to:

PROHIBITORY ORDER PROCESSING
CENTER
US POSTAL SERVICE
PO BOX 3744
MEMPHIS TN 38173-0744

Thirty days after your name has been added to the Postal Service reference list, any mailer who sends you sexually oriented advertisements may be subject to civil and criminal sanctions.

Your name will remain on the list for 5 years unless you ask to have it removed. At the end of 5 years, you must file again to have your name reinstated.

Refunds

Express Mail — The Postal Service issues a 100 percent postage refund to the mailer if an Express Mail article is not delivered on time, delivery is not attempted, or the article did not arrive at the pickup point for delivery to a post office box by the day and time noted on the mailing label. Complete Form 3533, *Application and Voucher for Refund of Postage and Fees,* at your local post office. Contact the local Express Mail manager for more details.

Stamps and Postal Stationery — Stamps damaged by moisture, humidity, or other causes while in your possession may be exchanged at full value. Unserviceable postal stationery and unused precanceled stamps may also be exchanged or refunded.

Unsolicited Merchandise

Federal law prohibits the shipment of unordered merchandise. Such a practice may constitute an unfair trade practice. Merchandise mailed in violation of United States Code may be treated as a gift by the recipient without any obligation to the sender. The laws governing this practice are enforced by the Federal Trade Commission. If you believe that you have received unordered merchandise in violation of federal law, contact the Commission's Bureau of Consumer Protection at:

BUREAU OF CONSUMER PROTECTION
FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON DC 20580-0001

Express Mail, Express Mail Custom Designed Service, Express Mail Next Day Service, First-Class Mail, the Postal Service logo, U.S. Mail, ZIP Code, and ZIP+4 are registered trademarks of the U.S. Postal Service. Priority Mail and Presort First-Class Mail are official trademarks of the U.S. Postal Service. The stamp designs are the copyrighted property of the U.S. Postal Service and may not be reproduced in whole or in part without the express permission of the Postal Service. Mailgram™ is a registered trademark of Western Union Corporation.

Consumer Advocate
United States Postal Service
475 L'Enfant PLZ SW
Washington DC 20260-2200

Publication 201, March 1998