



284 FW 2

# Mail Operations

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**2.1 What is the purpose of this chapter?** This chapter describes how Service employees must manage incoming mail and pay for and send outgoing mail.

**2.2 What are the authorities and responsibilities for mail operations?** See [284 FW 1](#) for the authorities and responsibilities for all the chapters in Part 284.

**2.3 What mail classes are available to employees?**

**A.** The United States Postal Service (USPS) has many mailing options available that we may use, including: Express, Priority, First-Class, International, Special Handling, Registered, and Certified. You can find more information about these services and others on the [USPS Web site](#) by clicking on "All Products and Services," and in the Service's [Mail Handbook](#).

**B.** We typically send postcards, letters, large envelopes (flats), and small packages using USPS First-Class, Priority, and Express Mail.

**C.** We may also use express package vendors, but only those that the Department has approved. Refer to the Service's [Mail Handbook](#) and [section 2.9](#) for instructions and information about what express vendors you can use.

**2.4 What are the basic functions of a Service mailroom?** See Table 2-1.

<b>Table 2 1: Mail operations</b>	
<b>Operation</b>	<b>Description</b>
Mail Service	Receiving, screening, routing, metering, and dispatching mail and coordinating with the local post office
Pickup and Delivery Service	Scheduling messenger service within an office (and sometimes between buildings and to satellite offices) to pick up and deliver mail and intra-office correspondence
Express Package Service	Receiving, processing, and delivering express packages

**2.5 How does the Service manage incoming and outgoing mail?**

**A.** We process mail by:

- (1) Centralized mail services (typically at Regional, Headquarters (HQ), or larger field station locations),
- (2) Coordination of mail pickup and delivery with the local post office (for field stations), or
- (3) Use of a Post Office (P.O.) Box (in areas where USPS mail pickup and delivery service is unavailable or the facility does not have a physical street address).

**B.** The responsible WO, Regional, or field station manager must:

- (1) Adhere to regulations in the [USPS Domestic Mail Manual](#),
- (2) Develop specific procedures and employ protective measures tailored for a given mail center or field station based on the results of the site's risk assessment (see [284 FW 3](#)),
- (3) Provide or coordinate appropriate training for personnel,
- (4) Sort and deliver mail as soon as possible after receipt, and
- (5) Immediately turn over any cash and supporting documentation sent through the mail to the WO or Regional Finance Office or local imprest fund manager for processing.

**2.6 Does the Service open mail addressed to a particular employee?**

**A.** We typically distribute mail unopened unless opening it is essential to:

- (1) Identify who it should go to,
- (2) Conduct an official law enforcement investigation, or
- (3) Address security concerns.

**B.** When it is necessary to open mail to identify who should get it, the employee handling the mail must:

- (1) Write on the incoming document who he/she is routing it to, and

(2) Attach the original envelope to the material.

### 2.7 How does the Service prepare and send mail?

A. When sending mail (except for express packages), employees must:

(1) Send it through USPS facilities,

(2) Correctly address and code their correspondence using proper mailing supplies (envelopes, tubes, cartons, etc.) and assemble intra-Service correspondence (with enclosures) for prompt dispatch,

(3) Place the sender's return address in the upper, left-hand corner above the words "Official Business,"

(4) Place a ZIP code in both the address and return address,

(5) Weigh and meter mail or affix the appropriate postage in the upper, right-hand corner of the envelope or package,

(6) Include mail codes in the return address,

(7) Minimize costs and consolidate mailings to the same address whenever possible, and

(8) Use standard-sized envelopes whenever possible (see Table 2-2).

Table 2 2: Envelope sizes	
Size	Inches
Minimum size for postcards and letters	5" X 3½"
Maximum size for postcards	6" X 4¼"
Maximum size for letters	11½" X 6 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>8</sub> "

B. Refer to the Service's [Mail Handbook](#) for additional information on preparing and sending mail.

**2.8 How does the Service pay for mail it sends?** We use commercial postage meters, stamps, penalty mail indicia, or penalty reply mail (see [section 2.12](#) for information on penalty mail)

#### A. Regions 1 - 8:

(1) Assistant Regional Directors are responsible for budgeting and paying for their mail-related expenses, and

(2) Assistant Regional Directors – Budget and Administration:

(a) Process mail-related expenditures and allocate costs within Regions, and

(b) Prepare and coordinate data calls and reports related to mail budget and expenditures.

#### B. Headquarters:

(1) Assistant Directors are responsible for budgeting and paying for their mail-related expenses, and

(2) The Assistant Director – Business Management and Operations, through the Division of Financial Management, processes mail-related expenditures and allocates mail costs.

**2.9 How does the Service pay express package vendors?** When sending express packages, offices must:

A. Use a vendor approved by the Department, and

**B.** Establish and maintain their own accounts and pay invoices with a purchase card. Offices must not use a general Service express mail account. For cost efficiency and ease of tracking, each office must establish its own express package account.

**2.10 When does the Service use commercial postage meters and stamps, and where do employees buy them?** Offices that:

**A. Spend \$1,000 or more per fiscal year** on postage should purchase a commercial postage meter for mail. You buy or rent these meters through the General Services Administration's (GSA) Federal Supply Schedule.

**B. Spend less than \$1,000 per fiscal year** on postage may use stamps instead of a commercial meter because it may be more cost-effective. Employees with credit card purchase authority may buy stamps/postage at:

- (1) The post office,
- (2) Online at the [USPS Web site](#), or
- (3) An approved Internet postage vendor, such as [Stamps.com](#).

**2.11 How does the Service manage inter-office mail?** Inter-office mail is mail we send from a WO, Regional office, or field station to another office (within the Region or outside of the Region).

**A.** When handling inter-office mail:

- (1) Employees must address it to the organization or program receiving office, mailstop, and the individual, and
- (2) Mail clerks must consolidate it whenever possible so that all the mail destined for the WO, a Regional office, or some other office is put in a single envelope.

**B.** Employees may distribute mail to office administrative support staff or put it in appropriate mail cubbies or mail slots.

**C.** Refer to the Service's [Mail Handbook](#) for more information on inter-office mail.

**2.12 What is penalty mail, and what are the Service's restrictions and requirements?**

**A.** Penalty mail is official mail that relates solely to the business of the U.S. Government and may be carried without prepaying postage. It got its name from the statement printed on it: "OFFICIAL BUSINESS. **Penalty** for private use, \$300." Penalty mail is charged to the Service through the U.S. Official Mail Accounting System (OMAS).

**B.** In 2003, GSA required that all Government agencies move away from OMAS, so we allow the use of penalty mail only in limited circumstances.

**C.** Employees:

- (1) Must **not** use penalty mail stamps or penalty metered mail.
- (2) Must use stamps or commercial postage meters instead.

**D.** Employees may use:

- (1) Postage indicia (e.g., for a mass mailing), or

(2) Penalty reply mail (e.g., for a return reply postcard for a survey).

E. Other restrictions include:

(1) Only matter relating solely to the business of the U.S. Government may be sent as penalty mail, and

(2) Unless we have special written permission from the USPS, we must not lend or provide penalty envelopes, cards, cartons, labels, meter stamps, or penalty mail stamps to any private person, concern, or organization. Penalty mail cannot be used for anything other than official U.S. Government business.

F. Refer to the Service's [Mail Handbook](#) for more information on penalty mail.

### 2.13 What is Business Reply Mail (BRM), and how does the Service use it?

A. BRM is preprinted mail (e.g., postcards) for which the Service, not the recipient, pays the return postage. For example, when seeking a reply from several members of the public on an issue, we may include a BRM return postcard in the mail we send to them asking them to reply. We only pay for the postcards that are returned. USPS charges the Service for BRM through OMAS.

B. Offices and programs that want to use BRM must:

(1) Request BRM envelopes or cards from the WO or Regional Publication Coordinator (contact information is included in the Service's [Mail Handbook](#)),

(2) Obtain a BRM permit from their local post office, and

(3) Provide the post office with the appropriate Agency Cost Code (121 + first 5 digits of the accounting string) for proper billing through OMAS.

C. Employees must not send BRM to someone from whom a reply is required by law or regulation (e.g., a grantee required to submit a progress report). These respondents must pay for their own postage.

D. Refer to the Service's [Mail Handbook](#) for more information on BRM.

### 2.14 What are the prohibitions related to mail management?

A. **Postage-Paid Envelopes.** Never give postage paid envelopes to bidders, contractors, lessees, grantees, cooperators, permittees, or any other non-Service party.

B. **Personal Mail.** Unless the employee is an authorized tenant in Government quarters, employees must not:

(1) Request receipt of personal mail of any kind at the workplace, or

(2) Use Service equipment or resources (e.g., internal distribution services) for processing personal mail or packages.

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