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Agricultural
Clearance

Examining United States Postal Service (USPS) International Mail

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Introduction

The *Examining United States Postal Service (USPS) International Mail* chapter of the MAC gives you the information needed to regulate packages and parcels in international mail facilities. See also “Clearing Mail Importations” of the *Special Procedures* section of your *Animal Product Manual*. All mail from foreign locations and U.S. possessions is subject to inspection. Inspection is necessary to minimize the risk of introducing agricultural pests.

Policy

PPQ policy is to clear all foreign parcels of agricultural interest at the first port of arrival into the United States. U.S. Postal Service (USPS) parcels are cleared at the mail inspection facilities recognized by Customs and Border Protection. The completion of AQI Monitoring (AQIM) activities on foreign mail parcels will provide valuable risk information to help create or revise the mitigation strategies of pest risk in foreign mail packages.

Materials Needed

Depending on local cargo holding procedures, you'll need access to some of the following items to control mail:

- ◆ Alcohol
- ◆ *Animal Product Manual*
- ◆ Bags for safeguarding quarantine material
- ◆ Brushes
- ◆ Can opener
- ◆ Forceps
- ◆ Forms (PPQ Form 287, Mail Interception Notice, and other appropriate forms)
- ◆ Hand lens
- ◆ Insect vials and pill boxes
- ◆ Knife or box cutter
- ◆ Personal safety equipment
- ◆ *Plant Import: Nonpropagative Volume of Manuals*
- ◆ *Nursery Stock Restrictions (List of Regulated Propagative Material)*
- ◆ Probe
- ◆ References, as appropriate
- ◆ Sealing tape
- ◆ Table or inspection area with adequate lighting

Local Variations

Because of the differences in CBP procedures, postal facility procedures, and local practices, the methods of inspecting mail may vary from port to port. Search warrants are mandatory for opening domestic mail.

Maintaining Contact with USPS

Port Directors and Supervisors should maintain close contact with their Postal Service counterparts to keep informed of any changes in mail handling procedures. Make sure that whenever procedures change, control is maintained over mail that is at risk for introducing pests and pathogens.

Determining the Thoroughness of Inspection Required

Take into consideration the season of the year and the likelihood of host plants and pests being sent from the country of origin to assess the thoroughness of your inspection. Decide if the package needs to be x-rayed or inspected. Examine profiled parcels to determine their contents. Use these general guidelines to examine parcels:

1. Examine the written Customs Declaration on the outside of the package. Decide if there are articles inside the package that must be examined.
2. Pick up the parcel and evaluate the weight of the box against the items listed. Consider inspecting the parcel if the contents seem heavier or lighter than they should.
3. Evaluate the destination address. Military bases, local ethnic enclaves, and colleges and universities may have resident foreign nationals who may receive foodstuffs from home.
4. Give priority to inspecting parcels from high-risk countries.
5. Be especially alert when you know of local holidays or holidays in the parcel's country of origin.
6. Use canine teams trained for mail inspection to help select packages for examination if available.



Packages arriving from Canada may contain agricultural items that actually originate from a third country. If in doubt, take the most restrictive action. For example, Canada does not grow citrus.

Checking for Permits

Check for permits (see *Appendix A* for examples) as follows:

1. Look on the outside of the package for PPQ Form 508 (green and yellow label), PPQ Form 599 (red and white label), or APHIS Form 2051 (blue and white label). These permit labels allow for onward shipment **without inspection** to the address on the label. These regulated packages often move to an APHIS Plant Inspection Station (APHIS PIS) for handling and inspection. They may carry prohibited plant material, genetically engineered material, or serious pests (live insects) from the country of origin.



Do not open packages with any of these three types of labels. Forward the package to the address on the PPQ or APHIS label. There are significant containment concerns because the risk of dissemination of material is great.

2. If additional addresses appear on the package that are not the same as the USDA address on the permit label, expedite the package, using existing mechanisms, to the nearest APHIS PIS. Do not allow the package to be forwarded to any other address. See **Appendix O** for a list of Plant Inspection Stations.



Important

CBPOs can make arrangements with USDA-APHIS-PPQ to open the package and examine its contents at a USDA inspection station. The DFO CBP Agriculture Liaison will assist with making these arrangements.

3. Refer to **Appendix A** for further specific information about APHIS permits and handling the various types of permit labels.



Important

APHIS issues permits and shipping labels (PPQ Form 508 - green and yellow label) for Small Lots of Seeds. Because seeds entered under this program do **not** require a phytosanitary certificate, you may forward them directly to the APHIS PIS **without inspection**.

Opening Parcels

Open parcels safely. Follow the steps listed below which incorporate the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) guidelines for inspecting parcels to avoid airborne and direct skin contact pathogens:

1. Turn off fans, portable heaters, and other equipment that may create air currents.
2. Look out for suspicious parcels (see **Figure 5-1-1 on page 5-1-5**).
3. Do **not** open suspicious parcels (see **Figure 5-1-1 on page 5-1-5**).
4. Put on latex gloves or other suitable hand protection before opening parcels.
5. Undo parcels so that skin contact with the contents is minimized.
6. Open parcels so you do **not** disturb or damage the contents.
7. **Never** blow into parcels.
8. Keep hands away from nose and mouth while opening and examining parcels.
9. Remove items of agricultural interest for inspection.

10. Wash hands thoroughly after handling parcels.

Characteristics of Suspicious Parcels

Characteristics of suspicious parcels include the following:

- ◆ Crystals, powder, or powder-like residue on the parcel’s surface
- ◆ Suspicious or threatening language on the outside of the parcel
- ◆ Postmark that **does not** match the return address or there is no return address
- ◆ Excessive postage
- ◆ Restrictive endorsements such as “Personal” or “Confidential”
- ◆ Distorted handwriting, handwritten block-printed, or poorly-typed address
- ◆ Title but no name or an incorrect title
- ◆ Misspelled addressee’s name, title, or location
- ◆ Excessive tape or string
- ◆ Rigid, uneven, irregular, or lopsided parcel
- ◆ Soft spots, bulges, or excessive weight parcel
- ◆ Discoloration or an unusual odor

FIGURE 5-1-1: Characteristics of Suspicious Parcels

Determining the Condition of the Shipment

Determine the action to take based on the condition of the shipment, using Table 5-1-1.

TABLE 5-1-1: Determine Action to Take Based on the Condition of the Shipment

If the condition of the parcel’s contents is:	Then:
Satisfactory	CONTINUE to <i>Determining Admissibility</i>
Unsatisfactory as evidenced by decay or rotting of animal or plant materials ¹	1. REMOVE the questionable material 2. DISPOSE of the questionable material

1 If the condition of the parcel is unsatisfactory due to **other than** plant or animal material, turn it over to USPS for disposition.

Determining Admissibility

Categorize the article. Once you know the category, use one or more of the following documents to determine admissibility:

- ◆ *Animal Product Manual*
- ◆ Code of Federal Regulations (7CFR PARTS 300 to 399 and 9CFR Parts 1 to 199)
- ◆ *Plant Import: Nonpropagative Volume of Manuals*¹
- ◆ *Nursery Stock Restrictions* (List of Regulated Propagative Material)
- ◆ Clearing Flower Bulbs-CBP(http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ppq/manuals/port/pdf_files/ClearingFlowerBulbs-CBP.pdf)

Inspecting the Parcel's Contents

Inspect the contents of the parcel as follows:

- ◆ Look for pests (insects, snails, diseases, etc.)
- ◆ Isolate the pests and prepare them for submission or identification
- ◆ Remove any prohibited packing material or contaminants




If the parcel contains 13 or more items, or the seeds weigh 500 grams or more, forward the contents to the Plant Inspection Station listed on the USDA-APHIS permit. Check the permit and follow directions.

Taking Regulatory Action

Determine the correct regulatory action to take on parcels using **Table 5-1-2**. If the parcels contain propagative plant material, go to ***Inspecting Propagative Plant Material in International Mail*** on page 5-1-7.

¹ *Cut Flowers and Greenery Manual, Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Manual, Miscellaneous and Processed Products Manual, or Unprocessed Seeds Manual*

TABLE 5-1-2: Determine the Correct Regulatory Action on Parcels

If the contents are:	And the remaining contents are:	Then:
Admissible or not regulated		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. STAMP 'RELEASE' and enter your badge number 2. RECONDITION the parcel and ALLOW it to proceed 3. CONTINUE to Documenting Action Taken and Submitting Intercepted Pests on page 5-1-10
Inadmissible or regulated	Uncontaminated	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. REMOVE the inadmissible material 2. COMPLETE PPQ Form 287, Mail Interception Notice and place in the parcel 3. RECONDITION the parcel and ALLOW it to proceed 4. CONTINUE to Documenting Action Taken and Submitting Intercepted Pests on page 5-1-10
	Contaminated	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. STAMP 'REFUSED ENTRY' and enter your badge number 2. RECONDITION the parcel 3. COMPLETE PPQ Form 287, Mail Interception Notice, and place in the parcel 4. RETURN the entire parcel to the sender 5. CONTINUE to Documenting Action Taken and Submitting Intercepted Pests on page 5-1-10



Most live plant shipments and seeds require a phytosanitary certificate. Check the Nursery Stock Restrictions Manual for permit status, CITES status, or other special requirements. Most animal products require permits from Veterinary Services. A copy must be presented when required.

Inspecting Propagative Plant Material in International Mail

Propagative materials **except seeds entering under the Small Lots of Seed Program** must be accompanied by a phytosanitary certificate issued by the country of origin. Some examples of propagative materials include seeds for planting, plants in growing media, flower bulbs, green stalks with nodes, and rooted items. Use the following guidelines in **Table 5-1-3** for determining which shipments of enterable propagative materials to send to the USDA APHIS Plant Inspection Station on the PPQ Form 508 label. See **Appendix O** for a list of Plant Inspection Stations.

TABLE 5-1-3: Determine Which Shipments of Propagative Materials to Send to a Plant Inspection Station

If the material is:	And is:	Then:
Identified with a green and yellow label (PPQ Form 508)	—————→	SAFEGUARD ¹ and SEND ² to the Plant Inspection Station listed on the permit or permit label, ³ along with all the accompanying documentation ⁴
Prohibited by Federal Regulation (7CFR300-399)	Accompanied by a departmental or plant pest permit	
	Not accompanied by a departmental or plant pest permit	REFUSE ENTRY
A small lot of seed	Accompanied by a small lots of seed permit ⁵	SAFEGUARD ¹ and SEND ² to the Plant Inspection Station listed on the permit or permit label, along with all the accompanying documentation ⁴
	Not accompanied by a small lots of seed permit	GO to Table 5-1-4 on page 5-1-9
Neither prohibited nor a small lot of seed	—————→	

- 1 The plant material must be stored in a CBP limited access area.
- 2 The importer is responsible for making arrangements, and for the cost of forwarding the materials to the plant inspection station. The importer is also responsible for making arrangements for picking up or shipping the propagative materials after they have been released.
- 3 If additional addresses appear on the package that are not the same as the USDA address on the permit label, expedite the package, using existing mechanisms, to the nearest USDA plant inspection station. For more information on PPQ Form 508, see **Appendix A**.
- 4 See **Appendix O** for a list of plant inspection stations.
- 5 Small lots of seed in compliance with, and accompanied by, a small lots of seed permit do **not** require a phytosanitary certificate.

TABLE 5-1-4: Determine Which Shipments of Non-prohibited Propagative Materials to Send to a Plant Inspection Station

If origin is:	And is:	And is:	Then:
Canadian	Admissible with a written permit issued by USDA-APHIS ¹	Accompanied by the permit and a phytosanitary certificate or one of the following forms (unless the permit states that a phytosanitary certificate is not required): ◆ CFIA Form 5309 ◆ CFIA Form 5289 ◆ PPQ Form 925	INSPECT and RELEASE
		Not accompanied by the permit and phytosanitary certificate or one of the forms used in lieu of the phytosanitary certificate listed above	REFUSE ENTRY
	Is admissible without a written USDA-APHIS permit	Accompanied by a phytosanitary certificate or one of the forms used in lieu of the phytosanitary certificate listed above	INSPECT and RELEASE
		Not accompanied by a phytosanitary certificate or one of the forms used in lieu of the phytosanitary certificate listed above	REFUSE ENTRY
Other than Canadian	Admissible with a written permit issued by USDA-APHIS ²	Accompanied by the original phytosanitary certificate issued by the country of origin	SAFEGUARD and SEND ³ to the Plant Inspection Station listed on the permit or permit label, along with all the accompanying documentation ⁴
		Not accompanied by the original phytosanitary certificate issued by the country of origin	REFUSE ENTRY
	Admissible without a written permit issued by USDA-APHIS	Accompanied by the original phytosanitary certificate issued by the country of origin	INSPECT and RELEASE
		Not accompanied by the original phytosanitary certificate issued by the country of origin	REFUSE ENTRY

- 1 A shipment from Canada requires a written permit if it contains **any** of the following:
 - Articles that require a Postentry Permit
 - Plants regulated by CITES or ESA
 - Articles that require treatment as a condition of entry
 - Articles (except seeds) of *Malus*, *Pyrus*, *Prunus*, *Cydonia*, *Chaenomeles*, and/or *Rubus*
 - Articles (except seeds) of *Castanea* or *Castanopsis* destined to California or Oregon
 - Articles (except seeds) of *Pinus* (5-leaved), destined to Wisconsin
 - Articles of *Ribes* destined to Massachusetts, New York, West Virginia, or Wisconsin
 - Articles (except seeds) of *Planera* or *Zelkova* destined to California, Nevada, or Oregon
 - Seeds of *Prunus* destined to Colorado, Michigan, New York, Washington or West Virginia
 - Articles (except seeds) of *Vitis* destined to California, New York, Ohio, Oregon and Washington
 - Articles (except seeds) of *Corylus* from provinces east of Manitoba and destined to Oregon or Washington
 - Articles (except seeds) of *Pinus*
 - Articles (except seeds) of *Ulmus* destined to California, Nevada or Oregon
- 2 A shipment from any country **other than** Canada requires a written permit if it contains **any** of the following:
 - Articles that require a Postentry Permit
 - Plants regulated by CITES or ESA
 - Articles that require treatment as a condition of entry
 - Lots of 13 or more articles (other than seeds, bulbs or sterile cultures of orchid plants)
 - Seeds of woody plants (trees or shrubs)
 - Bulbs of *Allium sativum*, *Crocasmia*, *Gladiolus* and *Watsonia* from New Zealand
 - Articles of *Cocos nucifera* (coconut)
 - Articles (except seeds) of *Dianthus* spp.
 - Articles (except seeds) of *Castanea* or *Castanopsis* destined to California or Oregon
 - Articles (except seeds) of *Pinus* (5-leaved), destined to Wisconsin
 - Articles (except seeds) of *Planera* or *Zelkova* from Europe, St. Pierre Island, or Miquelon Island, and destined to California, Nevada, or Oregon
 - Solanum tuberosum* true seed from New Zealand and the area of Chile between 39 degrees and 44 degrees South latitude
- 3 The importer is responsible for making arrangements, and for the cost of forwarding the materials to the plant inspection station. The importer is also responsible for making arrangements for picking up or shipping the propagative materials after they have been released.
- 4 See **Appendix O** for a list of plant inspection stations.

Documenting Action Taken and Submitting Intercepted Pests

Document the action taken and submit intercepted pests as follows:

- ◆ Submit intercepted pests using PPQ Form 309A, Interception Record. Make sure you record 'Mail' in the "Where Intercepted" block of the form (see *PPQ Form 309A, Pest Interception Record on page A-1-90*).
- ◆ Complete your local log if the parcel was released
- ◆ File a copy of the completed *PPQ Form 287, Mail Interception Notice on page A-1-82* if articles were removed

Agricultural Quarantine Activity Systems (AQAS)

- ◆ Record your inspection data on the PPQ AQAS web site:

<https://mokcs14.aphis.usda.gov/aqas/login.jsp>

DHS Online

Or through the DHS web site:

<https://dhsonline.dhs.gov/portal/jhtml/community.jhtml>

This web site includes databases for:

- ❖ WADS (Work Accomplishment Data System)
- ❖ *PPQ Form 280, Web Based Database on page A-1-75*
- ❖ AQIM

