

ARS □ ERS □ NASS □ NIFA

Policies and Procedures

Title: Mail Management Program

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OCIO Mission Area for REE (OMAR)

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This P&P states the policy, procedures, and responsibilities for mail management within ARS, ERS, and NIFA.

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1. Purpose

The purpose for this policies and procedures (P&P) guide is to describe the REE policies, responsibilities and procedures for the mail management program. The objectives of the REE Mail Management Program are to improve the efficiency of mail operations and reduce the postal costs through better mail management practices.

2. Background

In accordance with Departmental Regulation, Mail Management, 3050-001, “each agency in the U.S Department of Agriculture must establish a mail Management Program and assure that their employees are aware of and comply with the provisions of this regulation”. This P&P provides the procedures and guidelines for ARS, ERS, and NIFA.

3. Policy

All mail processing operations will be prompt, efficient and adhere to the following:

- Use the most economical class, size, and type of mail services available, consistent with operational needs.
- Include postal cost, when required in contracts and program agreements, as part of the contract cost.
- Process all regular REE mail using commercial and government postal meters, regular postage stamps, or reimbursable agreements with universities or other Federal or State agencies.
- Use official mail systems for conducting business of the U.S. Government only. Official mail and official mail systems are not authorized for personal use.

4. Responsibilities

4.1 The REE Mail Manager:

- Develops policies to ensure that the overall mail management program for REE is cost effective and efficient.
- Develops procedures and issues policy in the mail management area.
- Provides assistance and advice to all REE offices in effective mail management.
- Conducts reviews to ensure that the provisions of this P&P are being followed.
- Monitors ARS, NIFA, and ERS mail practices and operations to effect improvements.

- Serves as liaison with the General Services Administration, Mail and Reproduction Management Division, Office of Operations, USDA (MRMD), Office of Operations, and USPS on mail management activities.
- Provides MRMD, as required, with pertinent information and reports concerning mail practices, volumes, and costs.

4.2 The Location Administrative Officers and/or their Designee:

- Implements the mail management policy prescribed by this P&P.
- Continually monitors mail practices and operations to effect improvements and costs reductions.
- Conducts reviews to ensure that the provisions of this P&P are being followed.
- Provides guidance to offices on mail management practices.
- Acts as a liaison with local Postmasters and local USPS Service Representatives. (Unresolved problems should be referred to the REE Mail Manager).

4.3 REE Mail Centers or Operations:

- Review outgoing mail to ensure that it is properly prepared and conforms to USPS mail standards. Information on USPS mail standards is available at the USPS website (www.usps.com).
- Inform mailers of preparation discrepancies and of alternatives that can reduce the postage cost of mailings.
- Obtain and refer to current postal publication appropriate to the mailing operation.
- Deliver all mail which is adequately addressed to the appropriate mail drop within 4 hours of receipt from USPS. All mail which is inadequately addressed will be returned to the USPS as undeliverable.
- Comply with the requirements of this P&P.
- Receive and dispatch mail according to prescribed operating instructions for their respective office.
- Use the most economical class, size, and type of mail service available, consistent with operational needs. Cooperate with the REE Mail Manager and designated personnel on mail management activities.

5. Authorities

- 39 USC 32, 18 USC 1719, FRM 102-192 Mail Management, Departmental Regulation,

- 3050-001, Domestic Mail Manual, U.S. Postal Service, International Mail Manual, U.S. Postal Service.

6. Definitions

6.1 Agency Mail Manager

The person who manages the overall mail communications program of an agency within the USDA. The agency mail manager also represents the USDA agency in its relationship with the USDA Departmental Mail Manager, service providers, other agency mail managers, and the GSA Office of Travel, Transportation, and Asset Management.

6.2 Class of Mail

There are five categories of domestic mail as defined by the United States Postal Service (USPS) in the Domestic Mail Manual (DMM) (C100 through C600). These categories are: Express Mail, First Class and Priority Mail, Standard Mail (e.g. bulk marketing mail), Periodicals, and Package Services.

6.3 International Mail

Mail sent to Canada, Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia and other countries that are not States, territories, or possessions of the United States.

6.4 Official Mail

Mail used to conduct the business of USDA and its agencies. As such, USDA mail is considered Government property and is subject to the rules governing the use of government property.

6.5 Official Mail Accounting System (OMAS)

The United States Postal Services government tracking system that tracks postage used by most USDA's agencies. The GSA has mandated that all government agencies convert to commercial payment processes. However, USDA and several agencies still use the OMAS for tracking government postage.

6.6 Postage

Money due or paid to any service provider.

6.7 Service Provider

An agency or company that delivers mail. Examples of this service are USPS, UPS, FedEx, courier services, and the State Department Diplomatic Pouch Mail Division.

6.8 Unauthorized use of Agency Postage

The use of penalty or commercial mail stamps, meter impressions, or other postage indicia for personal or unofficial use.

6.9 Express Mail

Express Mail is an expedited, guaranteed delivery class of mail providing overnight or same day service to a designated location. This class of mail is particularly designed for time-sensitive materials or letters and is rated by weight and distance.

6.10 Registered Mail

Registered mail provides added protection for valuables and other important mail and indemnity in case of loss or damage. It provides a receipt to the sender at the time of mailing and post office record of mailing.

6.11 Certified Mail

Certified mail provides a record of mailing to the sender and a record of delivery at the post office of delivery. The carrier delivering the item obtains a signature from the addressee on a postal receipt. For an additional fee, a return receipt will be sent to the mailer.

7. Procedures

7.1 Postage Meters

Area and field location offices are required to procure their own postage meters, maintain their meter spending, and other mailing equipment. The Administrative Officers and/or their designee should develop and maintain a system that tracks, maintains, and reports their postage expenditures and mail volumes. Headquarters offices do not lease or need to purchase postage meter equipment. All Headquarter offices use the USDA department meters for metered mail. The meter reports for Headquarter offices are maintained by the Department. All Locations are required to maintain a meter daily log book of the meter mailings. Each office should use the following procedures for meter mail:

- Opening Procedures: Take the meter reading.
Turn the meters on each day.
Input the access code information.
- Closing Procedures: Take the meter readings.
Secure all meters.
Make sure the meters are turned off.

7.2 Postal Classes and Special Services

It is the responsibility of the office making the mailing to determine the class and any required special service. To ensure timely receipt and economy, select the class and special service on the basis of the priority of the material being mailed. Postal services and fees are located at the United States Postal Service website www.usps.com.

To ensure the desired necessary level of service the office making the mailing should mark all mail larger than letter size as to the type of service desired. The marking should appear in the area between the meter stamp (upper right corner) and the mailing address. Improperly metered mail can cause a delay in delivery and may be refused by the USPS.

7.3 Reply Mail

When requesting information of value to the U.S. Government, it is permissible to enclose a return self-addressed official envelope containing the postage with the request. There are several methods for doing this. To determine the appropriate method each office should consider the following based on their volume of reply mail:

7.3.1 Postage Stamps

Offices having a limited amount of return mail, less than 260 pieces annually, should use postage stamps.

7.3.2 Business Reply Mail (BRM)

For an annual permit fee, a BRM permit is available for distributing business reply envelopes, self-mailers, cartons, and labels. BRM allows the permit holder to receive First-Class Mail and receive Mail back from customers by paying postage only on the mail returned. The BRM permit holder guarantees payment of First-Class Mail postage plus a per piece charge for pieces returned by the USPS. The USPS designs the mailpiece or label, including a unique ZIP+4 code.

7.4 Postage Due Mail

Except in unusual circumstances, such as receipt of perishable items or items specifically ordered by the addressee (receiving office), postage due mail, i.e., public mail or mail delivered to REE offices without sufficient postage, should be refused. Officials in charge of mail operations will determine when special circumstances warrant accepting postage due mail. Payment of postage due for Official Mail will be made through OMAS.

7.5 Returned Mail

Listed below are the reasons for USPS to return mail to the sender:

7.5.1 Insufficient Postage:

Not providing the correct postage.

7.5.2 Undeliverable mail:

7.5.2.1 First Class: Undeliverable first-class and priority mail are automatically returned to the sender. There is no additional charge for this service.

7.5.2.2 Standard Mail (A & B): USPS uses discretion when returning undeliverable standard mail. Due to additional fees, officials in charge of mail operations will determine when

circumstances warrant accepting returned standard mail. If the decision is made to accept undeliverable standard mail, use a postage meter stamp to pay the additional postage.

7.6 Small Package Courier Service

The GSA selected the United Parcel Service (UPS) as the official small package courier service for the Federal Government. Agencies in USDA that ship hazardous and/or infectious materials should use the most cost effective courier service for their site.

7.7 Misuse of Official Mail

Official mail may only be used for conducting business of the U.S. Government and is not authorized for personal use. It may not be used to submit an application for employment, mail material for other organizations, or send personal items to individuals.

Employees may not use the USDA or REE mail and messenger distribution systems for receiving or dispatching personal mail. Employees should instruct their correspondents to send personal mail to their residences rather than to their offices.

7.8 Priority Mail

All First-class mail exceeding 13 ounces is considered Priority Mail. Priority Mail, in most cases, is almost two times the rates for standard mail (formerly fourth-class packages). Therefore, before deciding to mail packages at the priority rate, the sender should determine that the speed of delivery is more important than cost. Employees are reminded to mail material early to ensure that expensive services are used only when absolutely necessary.

7.9 Periodicals

Printing facilities prepare magazines and newspapers for mail distribution. A permit must be obtained from USPS and samples of the proposed publication must be submitted. Further information is available from the USPS account representative or the mail classification office serving each location.

7.10 Standard Mail

Mail that does not require expedited or First-class service and is not mailed as First-Class Mail is entered as Periodical mail. Standard mail includes printed matter, flyers, circulars, advertising, newsletters, bulletins, catalogs, and small parcels.

7.11 Special Mailing Services

Special services are offered by the USPS to guarantee delivery, provide indemnity, and expedite delivery of mail. Since most of these services are costly, they should only be used when the cost justifies the benefits the service can provide. The fees are in addition to the required postage.

7.12 Special Handling

Special handling provides preferential handling, but not preferential delivery, to the extent practicable in dispatch and transportation. The service does not itself insure the article against loss or damage. Special handling service is mandatory for material that requires extra care in handling, transportation, and delivery. The special handling fee must be paid in addition to postage for each addressed piece for which special handling service is desired. Except for official mail the special handling fee must be paid at the time of mailing. For official mail, the special handling fee is collected under established reimbursement procedures.

7.13 Return Receipts

Return receipt service provides a mailer with evidence of delivery (to whom the mail was delivered and date of delivery), along with information about the recipient's actual delivery address. A mailer purchasing return receipt service at the time of mailing may choose to receive the return receipt by mail or electronically. The electronic option is not available for items mailed to APO or U.S. territories, First Class Mail, Standard Mail prepared as parcels, and packing services when purchased at the time of mailing with COD or Insured mail.

7.14 Certificates of Mailing

Certificates of mailing furnish evidence of mailing only. A receipt is not obtained when the mail is delivered to the addressee. The fee paid for certificates of mailing does not insure the article against loss or damage. Use the certificate of mailing instead of certified mail when proof of mail entering the postal system is required.

7.15 Restricted Delivery

Restricted delivery provides a means for a sender to directly send a delivery to a specific individual.

8. Mail Safety and Security

Each REE mail center shall maintain a safe and secure environment. In the event that a suspicious letter or package is found, the following procedures should be observed.

- Handle with care. Do not shake or bump.
- Do not open, smell, touch, or taste.
- Isolate letter or package immediately.
- Treat letter or package as suspect.
- Call your immediate supervisor.

Problems/Questions should be referred to Yvette Anderson, Mail Administrator, ARS-OCIO via e-mail at Yvette.Anderson@ars.usda.gov or via telephone at 301-504-1091.

Approved for distribution



PAUL GIBSON
Chief Information Officer

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Date

Abbreviations:

BRM - Business Reply Mail

CFR - Code of Federal Regulations

FED EX - Federal Express

GSA - General Service Administration

IMM - International Mail Manual, U.S. Postal Service

MRMD - Mail and Reproduction Management Division, Office of Operations, USDA

OMAS - Official Mail Accounting System

P&P - Policies and Procedures

REE - Research, Education, and Economics

UPS - United Parcel Service

USC - United States Code

USDA - United States Department of Agriculture

USPS - United States Postal Service