

Department of Veterans Affairs
Washington, DC 20420

VA Directive 6340
Transmittal Sheet
October 11, 1996

MAIL MANAGEMENT

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** To revise Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) mail management policy formerly contained in Chapter 6, "Mail Management," Part II, VA Manual MP-1, "General Administrative." This VA Manual is converted to "VA Directive 6340, Mail Management."
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This directive sets forth the policies and responsibilities for managing VA's Mail Management Program.
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** Information Management Service (045A), Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Information Resources Management, is responsible for the contents of this directive.
- 4. RELATED HANDBOOK:** VA Handbook 6340, Mail Management Procedures.
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** MP-1, Part II, Chapter 6, "Mail Management," dated November 6, 1992. Reports rescinded are RCS 70-0409, Mail Subject to Sampling, and RCS 70-0696, Direct Accountability Mail.

CERTIFIED BY:

**BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:**

Nada D. Harris
Deputy Assistant Secretary for
Information Resources Management

D. Mark Catlett
Assistant Secretary for Management

Distribution: RPC 0726
FD

MAIL MANAGEMENT

1. PURPOSE

- a. This directive establishes policy for a Departmentwide Mail Management Program and implements the provisions found in the Federal Property Management Regulations.
- b. The Mail Management Program is designed to provide rapid handling and accurate delivery of mail throughout the Department at minimum cost consistent with mission requirements.

2. POLICY

- a. Mail under the jurisdiction of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will be handled by the most economical and effective means, through use of sound workflow principles; the most cost-effective equipment, supplies and devices; by keeping operations as efficient as possible, and by choosing the most cost-effective carrier and product.
- b. Operation of postal contract stations by VA employees or organizations is not authorized. Appropriations of VA may not be used to support operation of postal stations on either a full- or part-time basis regardless of whether reimbursement is made by the United States Postal Service (USPS). VA elements may participate in and/or be the lead agency in a Cooperative Administrative Support Unit (CASU). They will, however, limit their activities to those normally performed by large-volume customers of USPS and/or service bureaus such as preparing official mail for dispatch, sorting and delivering incoming mail, and metering mail.
- c. Uniform mail routing symbols will be used for identifying, sorting, and delivering mail.
- d. VA will reimburse the USPS for all official mailings.
- e. Mailing indicia, including meter impressions and permit imprint authorizations, will never be used by employees for personal mail (any mail which does not relate exclusively to the business of the Government). Such mail includes, but is not limited to, holiday greetings, retirement announcements, job resumes (including Standard Forms 171, Application for Federal Employment), and all similar materials. Individuals using any official mailing indicia item authorized by law to avoid the payment of postage or registry fee on private mail can be fined not more than \$300.
- f. Every mail facility and mail manager/representative must maintain a current copy of the USPS's Domestic Mail Manual (DMM) which will provide extensive information about mail services, classes, design, discounts, fees, etc. In addition, mail managers/representatives should know the name and telephone number of the USPS Account Representative at the local postal facility.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. **Assistant Secretary for Management.** Administers the Departmentwide mail management program which includes:

(1) Developing and recommending to the Secretary, policies and directives concerning the Mail Management Program.

(2) Serving as the primary Department official for coordinating this program with all other VA Information Resources Management programs.

b. **Deputy Assistant Secretary for Information Resources Management.** Recommends to the Assistant Secretary for Management the Departmentwide policies, plans, procedures, and directives pertaining to the Mail Management Program.

c. **Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Program Assistance.** Establishes and recommends to the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Information Resources Management the Departmentwide policies, plans, procedures, and directives pertaining to the Mail Management Program which includes:

(1) Formulating and evaluating Departmentwide plans, policies, and procedures pertaining to mail management to ensure maximum deliverability at minimum cost consistent with the mission requirements of the Department.

(2) Maintaining liaison with USPS, Office of Management and Budget (OMB), General Services Administration (GSA), other Government agencies and vendors of mailing equipment, supplies, and transportation to ensure the maintenance of quality service and adherence to any applicable regulations on all mail management matters.

(3) Notifying USPS by September 15 of each year of the estimated amount of postage reimbursement VA will make for the following fiscal year, and making adjustment in VA's payment, when necessary.

(4) Ensuring that quarterly meetings are held with VACO mail managers to discuss problems and new programs.

d. **Administration Heads, Assistant Secretaries, Other Key Officials and Deputy Assistant Secretaries.** Establish and administer Mail Management Programs in the offices and field facilities under their jurisdiction. This includes:

(1) Implementing the Mail Management Program including establishment of a central control point over mail distribution to ensure efficient planning, operation of routes, and schedules and use of the most cost-effective methods of accounting for postage use.

(2) Designating a mail manager for their respective administration or staff office, and establishing a system for monitoring mail operations and conducting surveys and studies as necessary, to ensure that the operations are being executed in an efficient and economical manner.

(3) Maintaining liaison with the local postmaster on mail matters to enhance service to the maximum extent possible including participation in the activities of the local Postal Customer Council and consultation on a regular basis with the assigned USPS Account Representative.

(4) Maintaining a current list of mail routing symbols and notifying the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration of changes as they occur both in VA Central Office (VACO) and in the field.

(5) Obtaining the concurrence of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration before publishing new or changed mail routing symbols in VACO.

(6) Choosing the most cost-effective carrier and product consistent with the provisions of 39 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Parts 310 and 320, "Private Express Statutes" (a group of Federal statutes giving the Postal Service the exclusive right, with certain limited exceptions to carry letters for others).

(7) Forwarding to their respective administration and/or staff office mail representatives in VACO, copies of all postal service forms as required by agency policy.

(8) Using the respective five digit cost codes on all USPS forms when utilizing the various mail services.

(9) Auditing and certifying for payment USPS Official Mail Accounting System reports on Express Mail, Business Reply Mail, Permit Imprint mailings, and meter charges against facility records.

(10) Maintaining a copy of USPS Form 3602-G, Statement of Mailing With Penalty Permit Imprints (using appropriate administration/staff office code) when printing contractors are allowed to use VA's permit imprint number.

e. **Deputy Assistant Secretary for Budget.** In addition to the responsibilities outlined in subparagraph 3.d. will coordinate with the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Information Resources Management when formulating budget projections for mail costs.

f. **Deputy Assistant Secretary for Financial Management.** In addition to the responsibilities outlined in subparagraph 3.d. will arrange for payments to USPS through the Department of the Treasury's On-Line Payment and Collection System.

g. **Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration.** In addition to the responsibilities outlined in subparagraph 3.d. will:

(1) Assign and control mail routing symbols for VACO organizational elements and for non-VA organizations for which mail service is provided (such as Veterans Service Organizations and contractors).

(2) Consolidate, reproduce, and distribute a list of VACO and field facilities' mail routing symbols and addresses (Consolidated Address and Territorial Bulletin series) every two years.

(3) Maintain current and complete mail routing instructions to facilitate distribution of mail within VACO.

4. DEFINITION(S)

Mail. Is used in this directive to describe letters, memoranda, postal cards, reports, forms and form letters, documents, papers, packages, publications, and other material received, distributed internally, or dispatched by VA. Mailability requirements, restrictions, and exceptions are found in the USPS Domestic Mail Manual (other mail vendors provide similar written guidance for items sent via their delivery services).

MAIL MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** This handbook establishes the procedures that implement the policies contained in VA Directive 6340, Mail Management.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This handbook describes the requirements necessary to process mail for the efficient and effective operation of the Department's mail management program.
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** Information Management Service (045A4), Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Information Resources Management, is responsible for the material contained in this handbook.
- 4. RELATED DIRECTIVE:** VA Directive 6340, Mail Management.
- 5. RESCISSION:** VA Manual MP-1, Part II, Chapter 6, dated November 6, 1992.

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MAIL MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES

1. **PURPOSE AND SCOPE:** This handbook implements VA Directive 6340, Mail Management, and contains procedures to accomplish an effective VA Mail Management Program. These procedures describe:

a. Cost-effective routing, sorting, controlling, analyzing, and safeguarding of incoming mail as well as the principles to be followed in managing internal and outbound mail.

b. Accountability methods VA mailers may use to determine the amount of reimbursement due USPS for services rendered.

c. Policies and responsibilities prescribed in VA Directive 6340.

2. GENERAL

a. Processing Incoming Mail

(1) **Using Mail Routing Symbols.** Delivery stops will be established in VA Central Office and at field facilities on the basis of mail routing symbols rather than room numbers. If the location of a delivery point is changed, the mail manager or designated official will immediately notify the mailroom. Employees will include their mail routing symbol when furnishing their address to correspondents and in their return address on outbound mail. The mail routing symbol will be prefixed by station number on mail leaving a field facility.

(2) **Establishing of Mail Routing Instructions.** The objective of incoming mail management is to deliver mail to the action office within the shortest possible time after receipt, at least within 4 to 6 hours whenever possible. To achieve this:

(a) Each Administration Head, Assistant Secretary, Other Key Officials, Deputy Assistant Secretary, and field facility director will furnish detailed instructions to subordinate elements for routing of mail to the office responsible for action, including:

1. A listing of the subjects of inbound mail,
2. A numerical sequence for forms, form letters, and reports, and
3. The mail routing symbol of the activity or office to receive the material for initial action.

(b) Mail routing instructions will be reviewed frequently to ensure they are current.

(3) **Sorting of Mail.** Mail will be sorted initially as follows:

(a) Mail which cannot be delivered directly without opening will be separated and set aside from deliverable mail.

(b) Mail not required to be opened will be sent to the action office. (If needed, the appropriate mail routing symbol may be written directly on the mail piece.) This mail will include:

1. Mail not requiring directory service.
2. Mail addressed to veterans service organizations having space at a field facility.

(c) Remaining official mail will be opened, read, and routed (with the incoming envelope) to the action office. The mail routing symbols may be written on the mail piece if needed.

(d) Express, First-Class and Fourth-Class mail that is not official will be returned to the sender.

(e) Employees living on a VA field facility may receive personal mail addressed to their official address.

(4) Time-Date Stamping of Mail

(a) Time-date stamping of mail will be used only where it is necessary to meet legal or other requirements. Examples include, mail related to formal or informal claims, appeals, invitations to bid; and congressional, registered, expedited, and special delivery mail. Requests made under the Freedom of Information Act and/or the Privacy Act must be processed within a specific time. It is imperative that these requests be time-date stamped immediately upon receipt. When time-date stamping is necessary, a single stamp impression will suffice; it should not cover any part of the correspondence required for processing.

(b) At a minimum, information to be reflected on time-date stamps will include time and date, designation (VA), installation; i.e., Central Office, Regional Office, and location.

(c) A time-date stamp will never be affixed directly on original documents such as discharge, birth, marriage, or death certificates, court records and papers to be filed in court, or similar certificates and records. When a date stamp is necessary, it will be placed on the letter of transmittal, accompanying envelope, or a 3" x 5" slip of paper. Paper clips, rather than staples or pins, will be used to attach VA records to such documents for further handling.

(5) Reducing the Volume of Incoming Mail. To reduce the volume of incoming mail, field facilities should consider alternatives to receiving mail directly at the facility. For example, leasing a Post Office box (if the facility has conducted a mass mailing to which it anticipates responses); and directing employees who do not reside at the facility to have mail sent to their home address rather than to their offices.

(6) **Processing Accountable Incoming Mail.** Accountable incoming mail includes registered, certified, insured, and expedited mail. Field facility directors will establish procedures for tracking this mail from receipt to the action office addressee. Field facility directors may designate employees of the mail activity to sign PS Form 3811, Return Receipt, for registered, certified, and insured mail for all field facility elements.

(7) **Misdirected Mail.** Mail received by VA which is addressed to other Government agencies, or to firms, or individuals will be returned to the post office. Express, First-Class, and Standard Mail (formerly third and fourth-class mail) received for former employees or patients for whom an address is available will be readdressed and then returned to the post office for forwarding.

(8) **Veterans Service Organization Mail.** Mail received at VA facilities for veterans service organizations will be forwarded unopened directly to the addressee without time-date stamping. When the service organization presents mail to VA, it will be time-date stamped to show when it was officially received in VA.

(a) Registered or certified mail with return receipts attached will be returned to sender stating that such mail cannot be forwarded. Exception: When a request indicates that judicial action is involved in which a process or notice of judicial proceedings is required, the mail will be forwarded. In such cases, the person who requests the forwarding will be advised that the envelope must bear sufficient postage to cover mailing and registry or certified costs plus the cost of return receipt, if appropriate.

(b) When mail is received with a letter of transmittal specifically asking that it be forwarded, it will be forwarded provided it does not involve matters defined in subparagraphs 4 (a) and (b).

(9) **Complaint Mail and Anonymous, Obscene, and Threatening Communications.** Complaint mail is any correspondence received containing allegations or complaints of a serious nature, or adversely reflecting upon VA or its employees involving internal administration; management and functioning of any office or activity, including mail administration; violation of Federal statutes, regulations, and VA policies; the conduct or actions of a VA official or employee, or organizations or individuals having official dealings or relationships with VA. Complaint mail received at field facilities will be processed as follows:

(a) Complaint mail, and anonymous, obscene, and threatening communications will be given priority handling and forwarded directly to the field facility director.

(b) The field facility director will:

1. Establish a single point for control and analysis of complaint mail and anonymous, obscene, and threatening communications.

2. Refer those communications which require VACO action through the Administration Heads to the Assistant Inspector General for Investigation (51).

3. Refer those communications that in any way threaten the life of the President of the United States, the Secretary of VA or any other Cabinet Level Official to the DAS, Security and Law Enforcement.

(10) **Safeguards**

(a) Postage Stamps

1. Removal. Postage stamps will not be removed from envelopes that must accompany communications nor will stamps be defaced or marked in any way that might destroy the postmark.

2. Use of Stamps and Stamped Envelopes Received From Correspondents. Stamps and envelopes received from correspondents will be used to mail replies to the correspondents when the postage is sufficient to cover the charges for mailing.

(b) Original Documents To Be Returned to Sender. Original documents will be returned to a sender by First-Class Mail (or priority) service. Examples of such documents are discharge papers, birth, marriage, and death certificates, court records and papers to be filed in court, and similar certificates and records. Under no circumstances will staples or tape be used to attach such documents to other VA material.

b. **Processing Internal Mail**

(1) Internal mail routes will be mapped out to prevent overlapping or duplication of service and to maximize the forward sorting of mail.

(2) Special pick up and delivery service will be used only when regular service will not suffice; e.g., when special urgent communications are sent to an agency outside the building.

c. **Processing Outbound Mail**

(1) **Accountability**. USPS requires VA to reimburse for services rendered. VA mailers are allowed to use all rate classes and categories except subsidized rates (i.e., non-profit and library rates).

(2) **Furnishing Self-Addressed Return Mailing Indicia is Not Authorized**. Postage paid return mailing indicia items will not be furnished to persons from whom official information is desired when the correspondent is required by law to respond or when it is of direct benefit to the correspondent to do so. Business Reply Mail or, when cost-effective, metered mail materials may be used for reply purposes but only for disinterested third parties. Department-paid return materials will not be furnished to debtors, creditors, and beneficiaries except for the return of larger than letter-size pieces including prosthetic devices, and for correspondence dealing with hard-to-fill vacancies or personnel actions such as grievances. A mailer wishing to use Business

Reply Mail must have the specially printed cards, envelopes, carton, and labels that may be mailed domestically but not internationally without prepayment of postage. The postage and fees are collected when the mail is returned to VA. All Business Reply mail materials will meet the USPS format requirements as shown in the USPS Domestic Mail Manual. Courtesy envelopes, such as envelopes preprinted with the correct address, perhaps in a distinctive color or with preprinted markings to facilitate sorting, on which the correspondent affixes postage, are permitted.

(3) **Addressing Standards.** It is imperative that all mail dispatched from VA bear a complete address, including suite or apartment number and correct ZIP Code. All addresses should also conform to USPS automation specifications. Details on addressing formats are contained in the USPS Domestic Mail Manual.

(4) **Surcharge.** USPS charges a surcharge for First-Class large envelopes weighing under one ounce that do not meet their machinability specifications. Mailers should avoid these surcharges whenever possible. Details on dimensions are contained in the USPS Domestic Mail Manual.

(5) **Mail List Management.** In accordance with the Government Printing and Binding Regulations, Title III, Section 31, General Provisions, "...Mailing lists will be reviewed at least once a year in order to eliminate waste in Government funds caused by publications and other materials being improperly addressed or mailed to persons no longer desiring them..."

(6) **Address Information System Products.** Offices responsible for mailing will make maximum use of USPS address information system products such as address correction. USPS offers a variety of products and services to help mailers maintain deliverable and automation-compatible mailing lists.

(7) **Dispatch of Defense Classified Material.** For instructions governing the transmission of defense classified material, see MP-1, Part I, Chapter 5, appendix A.

(8) **International Mailing Requirements.** The provisions of U.S. Postal Service Publication 42, International Mail, and the International Mail Manual apply and can be obtained through the local USPS account representative.

3. DATA COLLECTION

Federal Property Management Regulations, amendment A-53, subpart and section 101-9.302 requires that Federal agencies maintain annual records of their respective mail volumes (pieces) and postage expenditures (in dollars) by class, weight, special services, etc.

4. REFERENCES

- a. Domestic Mail Manual (DMM);
- b. International Mail Manual (IMM);
- c. Memo for Mailers;
- d. Postal Bulletins;
- e. Postal World;
- f. Title 18, U.S.C., Section 1719, Franking Privilege;
- g. Title 39, U.S.C., Section 3206, Reimbursement for Penalty Mail Service; and
- h. Title 44, U.S.C., Section 2901, Federal Records Management Amendments of 1976.