

## 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. Major changes to this Handbook include the addition of Mail Security Plans and Mail Rooms.
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** Office of Information and Technology, Enterprise Records Service, is responsible for the material contained in this handbook.
- 4. RELATED DIRECTIVE:** VA Directive 6340, Mail Management.
- 5. RESCISSION:** VA Handbook 6340, dated October 11, 1996.

**CERTIFIED BY:**

**BY THE DIRECTION OF THE  
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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 United States Postal Service (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 or business line's name 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, except when mail is sent or received from contracted mail processing facilities.
    - (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 (recipient unknown) directly without opening will be separated and set aside from deliverable mail.
- (b) Mail required to be opened will be placed in a tray and prepared for delivery.
- (c) Mail not required to be opened will be sent to the addressee office. (If needed, the appropriate mail routing symbol may be written directly on the mail piece.) This mail will include:
  - 1. Certified mail.
  - 2. Mail addressed to Veterans Service Organizations having space at a field facility.
- (d) 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.
- (e) Express, First-Class and Fourth-Class mail that is not official will be returned to the sender.
- (f) Employees living on a VA field facility may receive personal mail addressed to their official address.

(4) **Date Stamping of Mail**

- (a) Mechanical or digital 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 date stamped on the same day that they are received. Documents which are converted to digital images by contracted services shall have a date stamp applied electronically during the conversion process reflecting the date the material was received. When physical 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 date stamps will include date, designation (VA), installation ( i.e., Central Office, Regional Office, and field location.)
- (c) VA shall not request original documents such as discharge, birth, marriage, or death certificates, court records and papers to be filed in

court, or similar certificates and records unless required by law and will not return original documents received unless VA specifically requested an original. In instances where an original document was specifically requested, a 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) **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, *Domestic Return Receipt*, for registered, certified, and insured mail for all field facility elements.
- (6) **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.
- (7) **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 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).
- (8) **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 VA Central Office (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 Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS), Security and Law Enforcement.

## (9) 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 Document Handling. VA no longer requests original documents. Original documents will only be returned to a sender in instances where VA specifically requested original documents. Returned documents will be sent 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) **Special services.** Special services mean those mail services that require extra payment over basic postage; e.g., certified mail, business reply mail, registered mail, insurance, merchandise return service, certificates of mailing, return receipts, and delivery confirmation. 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 surcharge and 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. The USPS main web-site, <https://www.usps.com/>, offers a variety of products and services to help mailers maintain deliverable and automation-compatible mailing lists.

(7) **International Mailing Requirements.** The provisions of USPS Publication 42, International Mail, and the International Mail Manual apply and can be obtained through the local USPS account representative or via the official USPS web site.

### 3. MAIL SECURITY PLAN.

- a. Every Federal agency and agency location where an agency has one or more full time personnel processing mail must implement a written mail security plan. Contracted facilities for receipt or sending of mail shall have a mail security plan approved by the Contracting Officer Representative of the contract. The size and scope of the security plan should be commensurate with the size and responsibilities of each agency or location. The security plan should be updated whenever circumstances warrant. As a minimum, it should be reviewed annually.
- b. Security plans must include policies and procedures for safe and secure operations consistent with your agency's core mission. It must also include:
  - (1) Procedures for handling all incoming mail, regardless of service provider;
  - (2) Plans for security training for mail center personnel;
  - (3) Procedures for ensuring compliance with the standards established by the Interagency Security Committee that was established in accordance with Executive Order 12977, dated October 19, 1995 (3 CFR, 1995 Comp., p. 413). These standards can be found at <http://www.gsa.gov>;
  - (4) A list of all large facilities, their points of contact and telephone numbers; and
  - (5) Plans for annual reviews of the agency's security plan and facility-level security plans.
- c. Security plans should consider including facility mail managers participate in their building security committees, mail is transported in a safe manner, X-raying of mail occurs wherever occurs where appropriate.

#### 4. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS.

- a. Agencies (see Federal Management Regulation Chapter [§102-192.35](#)) must report to GSA annually either a mail management and security plan, revised sections (s) of that plan, or statement verifying that your plan has been reviewed and that there are no changes to it. The annual report must state that all facility security plans have been reviewed and that there are no changes to it. The annual report must state that all facility security plans have been reviewed by a competent authority within the past year.
- b. Agency mail management fiscal year reports are due to General Services Administration (GSA) on March 30<sup>th</sup> annually.
- c. VA must promptly report the name of the agency mail manager whenever it changes. GSA maintains an updated list of all Federal agency mail managers at GSA mail policy page.
- d. GSA will provide the format and reporting process for submitting the agency's annual mail management and security plan. These will be developed in collaboration with the Interagency Mail Policy Council. The final reporting format will be posted on the GSA Mail Policy Communications home page.
- e. Electronic submissions are encouraged. Submit electronic reports to: [federal.mail@gsa.gov](mailto:federal.mail@gsa.gov). All hardcopy mail reports must be submitted to:  
  
General Services Administration  
Office of Government-wide Policy Mail Communications Policy Division (MTM)  
1800 F Street, NW., STE 1221  
Washington, DC 20405-0002
- f. The reason GSA requires the annual agency mail management and security plans are to:
  - (1) Ensure that the large Federal mail programs have the tools and procedures in place to manage their operations efficiently and effectively;
  - (2) Ensure that appropriate security measures are in place; and
  - (3) Allow GSA to fulfill its responsibilities under the Federal Records Act, especially with regard to sharing best practices, training, standards, and guidelines.

#### 5. 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.

## **6. MAIL ROOMS.**

- a. Mail rooms are defined as rooms, buildings or other enclosed locations within a facility or campus that are used solely for receiving, sorting and distribution of mail and small packages.
- b. Potential threats to VA mailrooms can include mailed explosive devices, chemical or biological agents. Theft of mailed materiel is also a potential threat.

**7. REFERENCES.**

- a. Domestic Mail Manual (DMM)
- b. International Mail Manual (IMM)
- c. Memo for Mailers – OMG (Official Mail Guide)
- 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
- h. Title 44, U.S.C., Section 2901, Federal Records Management Amendments of 1976
- i. VA Handbook 0730/4, Security and Law Enforcement, March 2013