



M000 General Preparation Standards

M020 Packages

Summary M020 describes the proper preparation of packages and bundles including counter-stacking, labeling, and palletization. The section discusses exceptions to package size and preparation, lists additional standards for First-Class Mail, Periodicals, Standard Mail, and Bound Printed Matter, and standards for the use of facing slips on carrier route packages.

1.0 BASIC STANDARDS

Facing 1.1 Except as noted in 1.2, all pieces in a package must be “faced” (i.e., arranged with the addresses in the same read direction), with an address visible on the top piece.

**Counter-Stacking—
Sacked and Palletized
Mail** 1.2 Packages of flats and other pieces of nonuniform thickness may be prepared by counter-stacking under these conditions:

- a. Counter-stacking should be used only to create packages of more uniform thickness that are more likely to maintain their integrity during transportation and processing.
- b. Counter-stacking is appropriate for saddle-stitched mailpieces and pieces where one edge is thicker than other edges or one corner is thicker than other corners.
- c. When counter-stacking, pieces must all have addresses facing up and be divided into no more than four approximately equal groups, with each group rotated 180 degrees from the preceding and succeeding group(s); prepare as few groups as possible to create a package of uniform thickness.
- d. Counter-stacked groups within a package should be as thick as possible, generally at least 1 inch thick.
- e. When pieces are nonuniform in thickness because they are thicker in the center instead of along an edge or corner, counter-stacking will generally not result in a package of uniform thickness (i.e., a football-shaped package would be created). Instead of counter-stacking such pieces, limit the height (thickness) of the package to 3 to 6 inches to ensure the package will stay together during normal transit and handling.

Labeling 1.3 Unless excepted by standard, each package (other than carrier route packages) must be identified with the pressure-sensitive package label specified in the standards for the class and rate claimed. On letter-size and card-size mail, the label must be placed in the lower left corner of the address side of the top piece in the package. On flat-size mail, the label must be placed on the address side of the top piece in the package. An optional endorsement line may be used in place of a pressure-sensitive label, subject to [M013](#).

**Securing Packages—
General** 1.4 Package preparation is subject to the following requirements:

- a. Packages must be able to withstand normal transit and handling without breakage or injury to USPS employees.
- b. Packages must be secured with banding, shrinkwrap, or shrinkwrap plus one or more bands. Banding includes plastic bands, rubber bands, twine/string, and similar material. Use of wire or metal banding is not permitted.



- c. When one band is used, it must be placed tightly around the girth (narrow dimension).
- d. Except under 1.5 and 2.1f, packages over 1 inch high (thick) must be secured with at least two bands or with shrinkwrap. When double banding is used to secure packages, it must encircle the length and girth of the package at least once. Additional bands may be used if none lies within 1 inch of any package edge.
- e. Banding tension must be sufficient to tighten and depress the edges of the package so pieces will not slip out of the banding during transit and processing. Loose banding is not allowed.
- f. When twine/string is used to band packages, the knot(s) must be secure so the banding does not come loose during transit and processing.

Packages on Pallets

1.5

In addition to 1.1 through 1.4, packages on pallets must meet the following standards:

- a. Except as noted in 1.5b, packages up to 1 inch in height (thickness) must be secured with appropriate banding, placed at least once around the girth, or with shrinkwrap. Packages over 1 inch in height must be secured with at least two bands (plastic bands, rubber bands, twine/string, or similar material), one around the length and one around the girth; or with shrinkwrap; or with shrinkwrap plus one or two bands.
- b. Packages may be secured with heavy-gauge shrinkwrap plus plastic banding, only shrinkwrap, or only banding material if they can stay together during normal processing. Except for packages of individually polywrapped pieces, packages on BMC pallets must be shrinkwrapped and machinable on BMC parcel sorters. Packages of individually polywrapped pieces may be secured with banding material only. Machinability is determined by the USPS. If used, banding material must be applied at least once around the length and once around the girth; wire and metal strapping are prohibited.

Package Size—Bound Printed Matter, Media Mail, and Library Mail

1.6

Each logical package (the total group of pieces for a package destination) of Bound Printed Matter, Media Mail, and Library Mail must meet the applicable minimum and maximum package size standards in M045, M722, M730, M740, or M820. The pieces in the logical package must then be secured in a physical package or packages. Wherever possible, each physical package for a logical package destination should contain at least the minimum package size. The size of each physical package for a specific logical package destination may, however, contain the exact package minimum, more pieces than the package minimum, or fewer pieces than the package minimum depending on the size of the pieces in the mailing or the total quantity of the pieces to that destination. Unless otherwise noted, the maximum weight for packages in sacks is 20 pounds. Except for mixed ADC packages and for carrier route packages prepared in sacks, each physical package of Bound Printed Matter must contain at least two pieces. For carrier route rate Bound Printed Matter prepared in sacks, the last physical package to an individual carrier route may consist of a single addressed piece, provided that all other packages to that carrier route destination contain at least two addressed pieces, and that the total group of pieces to that carrier route (the logical package) meets the carrier route rate eligibility minimum in E712. Packages prepared on pallets must meet the additional packaging requirements under M045 and each physical package, including carrier route rate mail, must always contain at least two pieces.



**Package Size—Other
Mail Classes**
1.7

Except for Bound Printed Matter, an individual package may be prepared with fewer than the minimum number of pieces required by the standards for the rate claimed without loss of rate eligibility under either of these conditions:

- a. A greater number of pieces would exceed the maximum physical size for a package and the total number of pieces for that presort destination meets the minimum volume standard (e.g., 30 pieces are available to meet a 10-piece minimum, but a package of eight pieces is 6 inches thick).
- b. The pieces constitute the “last package” for a presort destination and previously prepared packages met the applicable minimum volume standard (e.g., 505 pieces prepared in 10 50-piece packages and one five-piece package).

**Packages in Sacks—
Periodicals and
Standard Mail**
1.8

Periodicals and Standard Mail prepared in sacks must be secured in packages as follows:

- a. The maximum weight for all packages is 20 pounds.
- b. Packages up to 1 inch in height (thickness) must be secured with appropriate banding, placed at least once around the girth (narrow dimension), or with shrinkwrap. Packages over 1 inch in height must be secured with at least two bands (plastic bands, rubber bands, or twine/string), one around the length and one around the girth; or with shrinkwrap; or with shrinkwrap plus one or two bands.
- c. Packages should be measured at the lowest (thinnest) point to determine the package height.
- d. A package that exceeds the maximum prescribed height by less than the thickness of a single piece meets the standard (e.g., if a glossy piece is 0.625 (5/8) of an inch thick, five pieces may be secured in a package 3.125 inches high; if a piece with uncoated cover stock is 0.75 (3/4) of an inch thick, 11 pieces may be secured in a package 8.25 inches high).
- e. Packages of pieces with covers of coated stock that are not individually enclosed in a mailing wrapper (e.g., magazines or catalogs with glossy covers not individually enclosed in an envelope, uncoated paper wrapper, or plastic wrapper (polybag)) are subject to these conditions:
 - (1) Except as noted in [1.8e\(2\)](#), packages must not exceed 3 inches in height (thickness).
 - (2) Packages of such pieces secured with shrinkwrap plus one or two plastic straps, or with at least two plastic straps, one around the length and one around the girth, must not exceed 6 inches in height (thickness).
- f. Packages containing pieces with outer surfaces of uncoated stock are subject to these conditions:
 - (1) “Uncoated stock” also refers to pieces with coated covers that are individually enclosed in a cover or mailing wrapper of uncoated stock such as an envelope, sleeve, protective cover, partial wrapper, or polybag and pieces with outer surfaces composed of material other than paper (e.g., plastic, cloth, fiberboard, or metal).
 - (2) Packages must not exceed 8 inches in height (thickness); however, it is recommended that such packages not exceed 6 inches in height (thickness).

**Exception to Package Preparation—Mail in Trays**

1.9

In package-based mailings not entirely of card-size pieces (i.e., pieces not larger than 4-1/4 by 6 by 0.016 inch), mail need not be prepared in 5-digit packages if placed in a full 5-digit tray. Similarly, mail need not be prepared in other levels of packages when it will be placed in a full tray to the corresponding tray level, and none of the mail in that tray would have been more finely sorted if packaged. For example, the content of a full ADC tray need not be packaged if, when correctly sorted, it would have all been prepared in ADC packages to the same destination; conversely, this exception would not apply if some pieces would require preparation in 5-digit or 3-digit packages.

2.0 ADDITIONAL STANDARDS**Cards and Letter-Size Pieces**

2.1

Cards and letter-size pieces are subject to these packaging standards:

- a. The maximum thickness for packages of carrier route rate mail is 4 inches. The maximum thickness for other packages is 6 inches.
- b. Mailings consisting entirely of card-size pieces (i.e., pieces not larger than 4-1/4 by 6 by 0.016 inch) must always be prepared in packages.
- c. Packages must be prepared for mail in all less-than-full trays and 3-digit carrier routes trays; for nonmachinable Presorted First-Class Mail; for nonmachinable Presorted Standard Mail; for First-Class Mail and Standard Mail pieces where the mailer has requested “manual only” processing; and for nonautomation Periodicals.
- d. Separator cards or tic marks *may* be used instead of packaging for letter-size pieces in full 5-digit carrier routes trays of Periodicals and Enhanced Carrier Route Standard Mail. Separator cards or tic marks *must* be used instead of packaging for letter-size pieces in full 5-digit trays of automation carrier route First-Class Mail and automation Enhanced Carrier Route Standard Mail. The cards must be of paper or card stock, at least 0.25 inch higher than the highest pieces in the mailing, and in front of the corresponding groups of mail. The tic mark must be applied during the mailpiece production process and be printed on the top edge of the envelope, to the left of the center line of the envelope. Each tic mark must have its location referenced to the center line. The right edge of the tic mark must be 0.5 inch (± 0.125 inch) from the center line of the envelope. The width of the tic mark must be 0.5 inch (± 0.125 inch). The tic mark must extend over the top of the envelope, down each side a distance of 0.25 inch (± 0.125 inch). In trays of tic-marked mail, all mailpieces must be the same dimension so that the tic marks are visible.
- e. For mailings consisting entirely of card-size pieces and mail in less-than-full trays, packages must be secured with rubber bands, elastic strapping, flat plastic strapping, or string. (Elastic strapping must have a minimum strength of 15 pounds and a minimum of 150% elongation before breaking. Minimum tension, when applied to the package, must be 50% breaking strength. Elastic strapping may not be used unless approved by USPS Engineering. If requested, the mailer must be able to show such approval for the strapping material used for a mailing.)
- f. Packages up to 1 inch thick must be secured with appropriate banding placed once around the girth (narrow dimension). Packages over 1 inch thick must be secured with at least two bands, one around the length and one around the girth.

Flat-Size Pieces

2.2

Packages of flat-size pieces must be secure and stable subject to the following:

- a. If placed on pallets, the specific weight limits in [M045](#).



b. If placed in sacks:

- (1) For Periodicals and Standard Mail, the specific weight and height limits in [1.8](#).
- (2) For Bound Printed Matter, the specific weight limits in [M720](#).
- (3) For Media Mail and Library Mail, the specific weight limits in [M730](#) and [M740](#).

**Pieces With
Simplified Address**
2.3

For mail prepared with a simplified address, all pieces for the same post office must be prepared in packages of 50 when possible. If packages of other quantities are prepared, the actual number of pieces must be shown on the facing slip attached to show distribution desired (e.g., rural route, city route, post office boxholder). Packages must be secure and stable subject to specific weight limits in [M045](#) if placed on pallets, specific weight and height limits in [1.8](#) for Periodicals and Standard Mail placed in sacks, specific thickness limits in [2.1](#) for cards and letter-size pieces, and, for Bound Printed Matter in sacks, specific weight limits in [M720](#).

3.0 FACING SLIPS—ALL CARRIER ROUTE MAIL

All facing slips used on carrier route packages must show this information:

- a. Line 1: Destination city, two-letter state abbreviation, and 5-digit ZIP Code.
- b. Line 2: Content (as appropriate to the class), followed by carrier route type and route number (e.g., "NEWS LTRS CR R 012").
- c. Line 3: City and two-letter state abbreviation of the origin post office.

