

M000 General Preparation Standards

## M020 Bundles

**Summary** M020 describes the proper preparation of bundles including counter-stacking, labeling, and palletization. The section discusses exceptions to bundle 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 bundles.

### 1.0 BASIC STANDARDS

**Facing** 1.1 Except as noted in 1.2, all pieces in a bundle 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 Bundles 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 bundles 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 bundle of uniform thickness.
- d. Counter-stacked groups within a bundle 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 bundle of uniform thickness (i.e., a football-shaped bundle would be created). Instead of counter-stacking such pieces, limit the height (thickness) of the bundle to 3 to 6 inches to ensure the bundle will stay together during normal transit and handling.

**Labeling** 1.3 [3-18-04] [10-30-03] Unless excepted by standard, the presort level of each bundle (other than carrier route bundles) must be identified either with an optional endorsement line under M013 or with a barcoded pressure-sensitive bundle label. On letter-size mail (including card-size pieces), the bundle label must be placed in the lower left corner of the address side of the top piece in the bundle. On flat-size mail, the label may be placed anywhere on the address side of the top piece in the bundle. Bundle labels must not be obscured by banding or shrinkwrap. The following colors and presort characters apply to bundle labels:

- a. Firm (Periodicals use only), blue Label F.
- b. Five-digit presort level, red Label 5.
- c. Three-digit presort level, green Label 3.
- d. ADC presort level, pink Label A.
- e. Mixed ADC presort level, tan Label X.



**Securing Bundles—  
General**  
1.4

Bundle preparation is subject to the following requirements:

- a. Bundles must be able to withstand normal transit and handling without breakage or injury to USPS employees.
- b. Bundles 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, bundles over 1 inch high (thick) must be secured with at least two bands or with shrinkwrap. When double banding is used to secure bundles, it must encircle the length and girth of the bundle at least once. Additional bands may be used if none lies within 1 inch of any bundle edge.
- e. Banding tension must be sufficient to tighten and depress the edges of the bundle 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 bundles, the knot(s) must be secure so the banding does not come loose during transit and processing.

**Bundles on Pallets**  
1.5

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

- a. Except as noted in 1.5b, bundles up to 1 inch in height (thickness) must be secured with appropriate banding, placed at least once around the girth, or with shrinkwrap. Bundles 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. Bundles 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 bundles of individually polywrapped pieces, bundle on BMC pallets must be shrinkwrapped and machinable on BMC parcel sorters. Bundles 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.

**Bundle Size—Bound  
Printed Matter, Media  
Mail, and Library Mail**  
1.6

Each logical bundle (the total group of pieces for a bundle destination) of Bound Printed Matter, Media Mail, and Library Mail must meet the applicable minimum and maximum bundle size standards in M045, M722, M730, M740, or M820. The pieces in the logical bundle must then be secured in a physical bundle or bundles. Wherever possible, each physical bundle for a logical bundle destination should contain at least the minimum bundle size. The size of each physical bundle for a specific logical bundle destination may, however, contain the exact bundle minimum, more pieces than the bundle minimum, or fewer pieces than the bundle 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 bundles in sacks is 20 pounds. Except for mixed ADC bundles and for carrier route bundles prepared in sacks, each physical bundle of Bound Printed Matter must contain at least two pieces. For carrier route rate Bound Printed Matter prepared in sacks, the last physical bundle to an individual carrier route may consist of a single addressed piece, provided that all other bundles to that carrier route destination contain at least two addressed pieces, and that the total group of pieces to that

carrier route (the logical bundle) meets the carrier route rate eligibility minimum in [E712](#). Bundles prepared on pallets must meet the additional bundling requirements under [M045](#) and each physical bundle, including carrier route rate mail, must always contain at least two pieces.

**Bundle Size—Other  
Mail Classes**  
1.7

Except for Bound Printed Matter, an individual bundle 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 bundle 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 bundle of eight pieces is 6 inches thick).
- b. The pieces constitute the “last bundle” for a presort destination and previously prepared bundles met the applicable minimum volume standard (e.g., 505 pieces prepared in 10 50-piece bundles and one five-piece bundle).

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

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

- a. The maximum weight for all bundles is 20 pounds.
- b. Bundles 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. Bundles 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. Bundles should be measured at the lowest (thinnest) point to determine the bundle height.
- d. A bundle 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 bundle 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 bundle 8.25 inches high).
- e. Bundles 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\(2\)](#), bundles must not exceed 3 inches in height (thickness).
  - (2) Bundles 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. Bundles 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) Bundles must not exceed 8 inches in height (thickness); however, it is recommended that such bundles not exceed 6 inches in height (thickness).

**Exception to Bundle  
Preparation—Mail in  
Trays**  
1.9

In bundle-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 bundles if placed in a full 5-digit tray. Similarly, mail need not be prepared in other levels of bundles 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 bundled. For example, the content of a full ADC tray need not be bundled if, when correctly sorted, it would have all been prepared in ADC bundles to the same destination; conversely, this exception would not apply if some pieces would require preparation in 5-digit or 3-digit bundles.

## 2.0 ADDITIONAL STANDARDS

**Cards and Letter-Size  
Pieces**  
2.1

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

- a. The maximum thickness for bundles of carrier route rate mail is 4 inches. The maximum thickness for other bundles 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 bundles.
- c. Bundles 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 bundling 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 bundling 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 ( $\pm$  0.125 inch) from the center line of the envelope. The width of the tic mark must be 0.5 inch ( $\pm$  0.125 inch). The tic mark must extend over the top of the envelope, down each side a distance of 0.25 inch ( $\pm$  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, bundles 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 bundle, 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. Bundles up to 1 inch thick must be secured with appropriate banding placed once around the girth (narrow dimension). Bundles 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

Bundles 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 bundles of 50 when possible. If bundles 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). Bundles 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 bundles 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.

