

435 Mail Preparation

Overview

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1.0 General Information for Mail Preparation

1.1 Definition of Presort Process

Presort is the process by which a mailer prepares mail so that it is sorted to at least the finest extent required by the standards for the rate claimed. Generally, presort is performed sequentially, from the lowest (finest) level to the highest level, to those destinations specified by standard and is completed at each level before the next level is prepared. Not all presort levels are applicable in all situations.

1.2 Definition of Mailings

Mailings are defined as:

- a. **General.** A mailing is a group of pieces within the same class of mail and the same processing category that may be sorted together and/or presented under a single minimum volume mailing requirement under the applicable standards. Generally, types of mail that follow different flows through the postal processing system must be prepared as a separate mailing.
- b. Presorted rate and single-piece rate mail must not be part of the same mailing despite being in the same processing category.

1.3 Terms for Presort Levels

Terms used for presort levels are defined as follows:

- a. *5-digit:* the delivery address on all pieces includes the same 5-digit ZIP Code.
- b. *3-digit:* the ZIP Code in the delivery address on all pieces begins with the same three digits (see [L002](#), Column A).
- c. *Origin/optional entry 3-digit(s):* the ZIP Code in the delivery address on all pieces begins with one of the 3-digit prefixes processed at the sectional center facility (SCF) in whose service area the mail is verified/entered. Subject to standard, a separation is required for each such 3-digit area regardless of the volume of mail.
- d. *ADC:* all pieces are addressed for delivery in the service area of the same area distribution center (ADC) (see [L004](#)).
- e. *Mixed [ADC]:* the pieces are for delivery in the service area of more than one ADC.



1.4 Preparation Definitions and Instructions

For purposes of preparing mail:

- a. *Pieces* refers to individually addressed mailpieces. This definition also applies when *pieces* is used in eligibility standards. Quantities indicated for optional or required sortations always refer to pieces unless specifically excepted.
- b. A *full sack* is defined in the standards for the class and rate claimed.
- c. An *origin 3-digit* (or *origin 3-digit scheme*) tray/sack contains all mail (regardless of quantity) for a 3-digit ZIP Code (or 3-digit scheme) area processed by the SCF in whose service area the mail is verified. If more than one 3-digit (or 3-digit scheme) area is served, as indicated in [L005](#), a separate tray/sack must be prepared for each.
- d. The *required at [quantity]* instruction (e.g., “required at 10 pieces”) means that the particular unit *must* be prepared for the corresponding presort level whenever the specified quantity of mail is reached or exceeded. Bundles and containers may contain more than the specified *required at* quantity up to the applicable maximum physical size. Subject to applicable rate eligibility standards, smaller quantities may be prepared only if permitted. Where specified by standard, required preparation applies only if the mailer chooses to qualify for the corresponding rate.
- e. *Entry [facility]* (or *origin [facility]*) refers to the USPS mail processing facility that serves the post office at which the mail is entered by the mailer. If the post office where the mail is entered is not the one serving the mailer’s location, the post office of entry determines the *entry facility*. *Entry SCF* includes both single-3-digit and multi-3-digit SCFs.
- f. The *group pieces* instruction means the pieces are to be sorted together as if to be bundled but not actually secured into a bundle. Bundle labels and other bundle identification methods may be used for unsecured groups of pieces as permitted by standard.
- g. A *bundle* is a group of addressed pieces secured together as a unit. The presort process considers the total number of pieces available for the particular presort destination and assembles them into groups meeting applicable volume and size standards. When the standards for the rate claimed require securing the pieces in each group together, the result is a bundle. The term *bundle* does not apply to unsecured groups of pieces. Bundle preparation is described in [435.2.0](#).
- h. A “*logical*” *presort destination* represents the total number of pieces that are eligible for a specific presort level based on the required sortation, but which might not be contained in a single bundle or in a single container (sack or pallet) due to applicable preparation requirements or the size of the individual pieces. For example, there may be 42 mailpieces for ZIP Code 43112 forming a First-Class Mail “logical” 5-digit bundle, and they are prepared in three physical 5-digit bundles because of the applicable weight and height restrictions on bundles.

2.0 Bundles

2.1 Definition of a Bundle

A *bundle* is a group of addressed pieces secured together as a unit. The presort process considers the total number of pieces available for the particular presort destination and assembles them into groups meeting applicable volume and size standards. When the standards for the rate claimed require securing the pieces in each group together, the result is a bundle. The term *bundle* does not apply to unsecured groups of pieces.

2.2 Bundling Not Required

Bundling is not required if the parcels are 1/2 inch thick or greater and placed in a sack to the same destination to which they would otherwise be bundled (e.g., in a 3-digit sack rather than in a 3-digit bundle). Bundling also is not required if the parcels are so large that 10 or fewer fill a sack.

2.3 Arranging Pieces in a Bundle (“Facing”)

All pieces in a bundle must be “faced” (arranged with the addresses in the same read direction), with an address visible on the top piece.

2.4 Preparing Bundles of Pieces of Nonuniform Thickness (“Counterstacking”)

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.

2.5 Securing Bundles

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.



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- 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. 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.

2.6 Bundles With Fewer Than the Minimum Number of Pieces Required

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).

2.7 Labeling Bundles

Unless excepted by standard, the presort level of each bundle must be identified either with an optional endorsement line under [708.7.0](#) or with a barcoded pressure-sensitive bundle label. Bundle labels must not be obscured by banding or shrinkwrap. The following colors and presort characters apply to bundle labels:

- a. Five-digit presort level, red Label 5.
- b. Three-digit presort level, green Label 3.
- c. ADC presort level, pink Label A.
- d. Mixed ADC presort level, tan Label X.

2.8 Use of Optional Endorsement Lines (OEL)

An optional endorsement line (OEL) may be used to label bundles instead of applying pressure-sensitive bundle labels or facing slips to the top piece under [708.7.0](#).

3.0 Sacks

3.1 Presort

Presort, presort levels, and standard preparation terms are defined in 1.0.

3.2 Standard Containers

Mailings must be prepared in green sacks. A postmaster may authorize nonpostal containers for a small-volume presorted mailing if the mailing weighs no more than 20 pounds, consists primarily of mail or bundles of mail for local ZIP Codes, and requires no USPS transportation for processing.

3.3 Sack Preparation

All sack preparation is subject to these standards:

- a. Each sack must bear the correct sack label.
- b. The weight of a sack and its content must not exceed 70 pounds.

4.0 Sack Labels

4.1 Basic Standards

Only sack labels may be used for sacks. Machine-printed labels (available from the USPS) ensure legibility. Legible hand-printed labels are acceptable. Illegible labels are not acceptable.

4.2 Physical Characteristics of a Sack Label

A sack label must meet these specifications:

- a. Color: white or manila.
- b. Weight: 70-pound or heavier stock.
- c. Length (parallel to printing): 3.250 inches minimum; 3.375 inches maximum.
- d. Height (perpendicular to printing): 0.937 inch minimum; 0.980 inch maximum.

4.3 Line 1 (Destination Line)

Line 1 (destination line) must meet these standards:

- a. *Placement.* Line 1 must be the first visible line on the label. It must be completely visible and legible when placed in the label holder. This visibility is ensured if the top of this line is no less than 1/8 (0.125) inch below the top of the label when the label is cut and prepared.
- b. *Information.* Line 1 must contain only the information specified by standard, including the appropriate destination facility prefix (e.g., "ADC"). Two zeros may follow the 3-digit ZIP Code prefix required by labeling standards (e.g., 223 as 22300).
- c. *Overseas Military Mail.* On 5-digit sacks and trays for overseas military destinations, Line 1 shows, from left to right, "APO" or "FPO," followed by "AE" (for ZIP Codes within the ZIP Code prefix range 090-098), "AA" (for ZIP Codes within the 3-digit ZIP Code prefix 340), or "AP" (for ZIP Codes within the ZIP Code prefix range 962-966), followed by the destination 5-digit ZIP Code of the mail in the sack or tray.



4.4 Line 2 (Content Line)

Line 2 (content line) must meet these standards:

- a. *Placement:* Line 2 must be the second visible line on the label. This line must show the class and processing category of the mail in the sack and other information as specified by standards.
- b. *Codes:* The codes shown below must be used as appropriate on Line 2 of sack labels.

CONTENT TYPE	CODE
Digit	D
First-Class Mail	FCM
General Delivery Unit	G
Highway Contract Route	H
Mixed	MXD
Post Office Box Section	B
Rural Route	R
Working	WKG

4.5 Line 3 (Office of Mailing or Mailer Information Line)

Line 3 (office of mailing or mailer information line) must be the bottom line of required information and must show either the city and state of the entry post office or the mailer's name and the city and state of the mailer's location. It is recommended that the mailer's name also appear with the city and state of the entry post office.

4.6 Abbreviations for Lines 1 and 3

Lines 1 and 3 may contain abbreviated information if such abbreviations are those in the USPS City State Product.

4.7 Placement of Extraneous Information

Extraneous information is not permitted on the destination and content lines. It may be placed away from required lines, subject to these conditions:

- a. It may be placed above Line 1 in not more than 0.083 inch high type (6-point type).
- b. It may appear to the right of required Line 3 information but it must not consist of numerals that resemble a ZIP Code or 3-digit ZIP Code prefix.
- c. It must not appear between Lines 1 and 2 (a blank line is permitted), but may appear between Lines 2 and 3 if it does not consist of numerals that resemble a ZIP Code or 3-digit ZIP Code prefix.
- d. It may appear below Line 3.
- e. A mailer code assigned by the USPS or such words as "Mailer," "From" (or "FR"), or "Entered at" may appear before the required information on Line 3.

4.8 Barcoded Sack Labels

4.8.1 Basic Standards for Barcoded Sack Labels

Barcoded sack labels are not required on Presorted First-Class mailings. If used, they must meet these general standards:

- a. Barcoded tray labels and sack labels must not be interchanged. Tray labels must be used only for trays, and sack labels must be used only for sacks.
- b. Mailer-produced barcoded labels must meet the standards in [708.6.0](#), *Barcoding Standards for Container Labels*.
- c. All information on barcoded labels must be machine-printed. Alterations to preprinted barcoded labels (e.g., handwritten changes) may not be made.
- d. Barcoded labels must be inserted completely into the label holder on the tray or sack to prevent their loss during transport and processing.

4.8.2 Physical Characteristics of Barcoded Sack Labels

A barcoded sack label must meet these specifications:

- a. Color: white or manila.
- b. Reflectance: minimum reflectance requirements in [708.6.2i](#).
- c. Weight: minimum 70-pound paper stock (500 sheets, 24 by 36 inches).
- d. Height: 0.937 inch minimum; 0.980 inch maximum.
- e. Length: 3.250 inches minimum; 3.375 inches maximum.

5.0 Preparation for Parcels

5.1 Basic Standards

Each Presorted First-Class mailing must be prepared in green sacks and marked “Presorted” (or “PRSRT”) and “First-Class.” All pieces must be sorted together and prepared under [5.3](#) and [5.4](#).

5.2 Single-Rate Pieces Presented With Presorted Mailings

Regardless of the method of postage payment, pieces of single-piece rate First-Class Mail may be presented with and reported on the same postage statement as pieces claimed at presort rates if the single-piece rate pieces are physically separated from other pieces; bear no rate marking, or are marked only “First-Class,” or (if not affixed with full single-piece rate postage) are marked “Single-Piece” or “SNGLP” under [202.3.0](#) in addition to any other marking; and either have additional postage affixed to yield the correct amount on each piece or (if prepared with a corrective rate marking) have all additional postage paid at the time of mailing.

5.3 Bundling and Labeling

Bundling is generally required before sacking. A bundle must be prepared when the quantity of addressed pieces for a required presort level reaches a minimum of 10 pieces. Smaller volumes are not permitted except for mixed ADC bundles. Bundling is not required if the parcels are 1/2 inch thick or greater and placed in a



sack to the same destination to which they would otherwise be bundled (e.g., in a 3-digit sack rather than in a 3-digit bundle). Bundling also is not required if the parcels are so large that 10 or fewer fill a sack. Preparation sequence, bundle size, and labeling:

- a. 5-digit (required); 10-piece minimum; red Label 5 or optional endorsement line (OEL).
- b. 3-digit (required); 10-piece minimum; green Label 3 or OEL.
- c. ADC (required); 10-piece minimum; pink Label A or OEL.
- d. Mixed ADC (required); no minimum; tan Label X or OEL.

5.4 Sacking and Labeling

Preparation sequence, sack size, and labeling:

- a. 5-digit (required); 10-pound minimum; labeling:
 1. Line 1: city, state, and 5-digit ZIP Code on mail (see [4.3c](#) for overseas military mail).
 2. Line 2: "FCM PARCELS 5D."
- b. 3-digit (required); 10-pound minimum, except for required origin 3-digit(s); labeling:
 1. Line 1: [L002](#), Column A.
 2. Line 2: "FCM PARCELS 3D."
- c. ADC (required); 10-pound minimum; labeling:
 1. Line 1: [L004](#), Column B.
 2. Line 2: "FCM PARCELS ADC."
- d. Mixed ADC (required); no minimum; labeling:
 1. Line 1: "MXD" followed by city, state, and 3-digit ZIP Code prefix of facility serving 3-digit ZIP Code prefix of entry post office, as shown in [L002](#), Column C.
 2. Line 2: "FCM PARCELS WKG."