385 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 price 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 (e.g., automation, nonautomation carrier route, and other nonautomation) and mail for each separate class and subclass must be prepared as a separate mailing. Other specific standards may define whether separate mailings may be combined, palletized, reported, or deposited together.

b. Library Mail and any other type of mail may not be part of the same mailing even if 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. *5-digit scheme (bundles and sacks) for flats meeting the automation-compatibility standards in 301.3.0:* the ZIP Code in the delivery address on all pieces begins with one of the 5-digit ZIP Code ranges processed by the USPS as a single scheme, as shown in L007.

c. *3-digit:* the ZIP Code in the delivery address on all pieces begins with the same three digits (see L002, Column A).

d. *3-digit scheme bundles for flats meeting the automation-compatibility standards in 301.3.0:* the ZIP Code in the delivery address on all pieces begins with one of the 3-digit ZIP Code ranges processed by the USPS as a single scheme, as shown in L008.

e. *ADC:* all pieces are addressed for delivery in the service area of the same area distribution center (ADC) (see L004).

f. *Mixed [NDC, ADC, etc.]:* the pieces are for delivery in the service area of more than one NDC, ADC, etc.

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 price claimed.

c. A *5-digit scheme sort* for flats weighing up to 20 ounces and meeting the automation-compatibility standards in 301.3.0 yields 5-digit scheme bundles for those 5-digit ZIP Codes identified in L007 and 5-digit bundles for other ZIP Codes. When standards require 5-digit/scheme sort, mailers must prepare all possible 5-digit scheme bundles and sacks of flats before preparing 5-digit bundles and sacks. The 5-digit ZIP Codes in each scheme are treated as a single presort destination subject to a single minimum volume, with no further separation required. Bundles prepared for a 5-digit scheme destination that contain pieces for only one of the schemed 5-digit ZIP Codes are still considered 5-digit scheme sorted and are labeled accordingly. Bundles must be labeled using an optional endorsement line (OEL) under 708.7.0 or with a red “5 SCH” bundle label. Bundles are placed in appropriate containers using the OEL “label to” 5-digit ZIP Code or using L007 column B.

d. A *3-digit scheme sort* for flats weighing up to 20 ounces and meeting the automation-compatibility standards in 301.3.0 yields 3-digit scheme bundles for those 3-digit ZIP Codes identified in L008. When standards require 3-digit/scheme sort, mailers must prepare all possible 3-digit scheme bundles of flats before preparing 3-digit bundles. The 3-digit ZIP Codes in each scheme are treated as a single presort destination subject to a single minimum volume, with no further separation by 3-digit ZIP Code required. Bundles prepared for a 3-digit scheme destination that contain pieces for only one of the schemed 3-digit ZIP Codes are still considered 3-digit scheme sorted and are labeled accordingly. Bundles must be labeled using an optional endorsement line (OEL) under 708.7.0 or with a green “3 SCH” bundle label. Three-digit scheme bundles are placed in 3-digit through mixed ADC containers, as applicable, using the OEL “label to” 3-digit ZIP Code or using L008 column B.

e. 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 price 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 price.

f. The *optional at [quantity]* instruction means that the particular unit *may* be prepared for the corresponding presort level whenever the specified quantity of mail is reached or exceeded. Bundles or containers may contain more than the specified *optional at* quantity up to the applicable maximum physical size. Smaller quantities may be prepared only if permitted by applicable price eligibility standards. Standards for quantities with which preparation is optional are often followed by standards for larger quantities with which preparation is required.

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 price claimed require securing the pieces in each group together, the result is a bundle. Bundle preparation is described in 2.0, *Bundles*.

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.

2.0 Bundles

2.1 Definition of a Bundle

Mailers assemble pieces available for different presort destinations into groups. A *bundle* is a group of addressed pieces secured together as a unit.

2.2 Address Visibility

Mailers preparing presort bundles must ensure that the delivery address information on the top mailpiece in each bundle is visible and readable by the naked eye. Mailers using strapping that might cover the address can avoid obstructing visibility by using clear, smooth strapping tightly secured around the bundle. Mailers using barcoded pressure-sensitive bundle labels, optional endorsement lines, carrier route information lines, or carrier route facing slips also must ensure that the information in these presort designations is visible and readable by the naked eye.

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

Bundles must withstand normal transit and handling without breaking and without causing injury to USPS employees or damage to USPS equipment.
Mailers must meet the following standards when preparing and securing bundles:

a. Secure bundles with banding, shrinkwrap, or shrinkwrap supplemented with one or more bands. *Banding* includes plastic bands, rubber bands, twine, string, and similar material. Mailers must meet the following standards when banding bundles:

1. Do not place any bands closer than 1 inch from any bundle edge.
2. When using twine or string to band bundles, secure the knot(s) so the twine or string does not come loose during transit and processing.
3. Do not use wire or metal banding.
4. Do not use any loose banding.

b. When using only banding to secure bundles, apply banding under the following additional requirements:

1. Use at least one band to encircle the length of the bundle and use at least one band to encircle the girth of the bundle.
2. Use tension sufficient to tighten and depress the edges of the bundle so that pieces do not slip out of the banding during transit and processing.

2.6 Preparing Bundles

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

a. If placed on pallets, the specific weight limits in 705.8.0, *Preparing Pallets*.

b. If placed in sacks, Library Mail must meet the specific weight limits in 5.2.

2.7 Bundle Sizes

Each logical bundle (the total group of pieces for a bundle destination) of Library Mail must meet the applicable minimum and maximum bundle size standards in 5.2. 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. Bundles prepared on pallets must meet the additional bundling requirements under 705.8.0 and each physical bundle, including carrier route price mail, must always contain at least two pieces.

2.8 Other Bundle Sizes

An individual bundle may be prepared with fewer than the minimum number of pieces required by the standards for the price claimed without loss of price 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).

2.9 Labeling Bundles

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. The label may be placed anywhere on the address side of the top piece in the bundle. Barcoded pressure-sensitive bundle labels must not obscure the delivery address block. Banding or shrinkwrap must not obscure any bundle label. The following colors and presort characters apply to bundle labels:

a. Five-digit scheme presort level, red Label 5 SCH.

b. Five-digit presort level, red Label 5.

c. Three-digit scheme presort level, green Label 3 SCH.

d. Three-digit presort level, green Label 3.

e. ADC presort level, pink Label A.

f. Mixed ADC presort level, tan Label X.

3.0 Sacks

3.1 Maximum Weight

The maximum weight of any sack (mail plus sack tare) must not exceed 70 pounds.

4.0 Sack Labels

4.1 Basic Standards

Sack labels are subject to the following:

a. Use 1-inch labels for sacks with metal 1-inch label holders/closures.

b. Use 2-inch labels for sacks with 2-inch label holder pockets.

c. Use 2-inch labels for sacks with dual plastic label holders/closures. One-inch labels may be used but are not recommended.

d. Illegible labels are not acceptable. Machine-printed labels (available from the USPS) ensure legibility. Legible hand-printed labels are 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 (required for mailings of automation-compatible flats, optional for others).

c. Length (parallel to printing): 3.250 inches minimum; 3.515 inches maximum.

d. Height (perpendicular to printing):

1. For 1-inch labels: 0.937 inch minimum; 0.980 inch maximum.

2. For 2-inch labels: 1.860 inches minimum; 2.015 inches 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 or tray 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
Barcoded	BC
Digit	D
Flats	FLTS
General Delivery Unit	G
Highway Contract Route	H
Mixed	MXD
Nonbarcoded	NON BC (sacks)
Package Services	PSVC
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.

5.0 Preparing Presorted Flats

5.1 Basic Standards

All mailings of Presorted Library Mail are subject to the standards in 5.2 and 5.3 and to these general standards:

a. Each mailing must meet the applicable standards in 5.0.

b. All pieces must be sorted to the finest extent possible under 5.2 and 5.3 or palletized under 705.8.0.

c. Each piece claimed at Library Mail prices must be marked “Library Mail” under 302.3.0, *Placement and Content of Mail Markings*. Each piece claimed at Presorted Library Mail prices also must be marked “Presorted” or “PRSRT” under 302.3.0.

5.2 Bundling

5.2.1 Required Bundling

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 as allowed under 2.7 and 2.8 and for mixed ADC bundles. The maximum weight of each physical bundle is 20 pounds, except that 5-digit bundles, placed in 5-digit sacks may weigh a maximum of 40 pounds. Each physical bundle must contain at least two addressed pieces.

5.2.2 Bundling and Labeling

For mailings consisting entirely of pieces meeting the automation-compatibility criteria in 301.3.0, pieces must be prepared in 5-digit scheme bundles for those 5-digit ZIP Codes identified in L007 and in 3-digit scheme bundles for those 3-digit ZIP Codes identified in L008. Preparation sequence, bundle size, and labeling:

a. 5-digit scheme (optional, but required for 5-digit rate); red Label 5 SCH or OEL. See definition in 1.4c.

b. 5-digit; (optional, but required for 5-digit rate); red Label 5 or OEL. See definition in 1.4c.

c. 3-digit scheme (required); green Label 3 SCH or OEL. See definition in 1.4d.

d. 3-digit green (required); Label 3 or OEL. See definition 1.4d.

e. ADC (required); pink Label A or OEL.

f. Mixed ADC (required); tan Label X or OEL.

5.3 Sacking

5.3.1 Required Sacking

A sack must be prepared when the quantity of mail for a required presort destination reaches the minimums specified in 5.3.2 or 1,000 cubic inches. Smaller volumes are not permitted (except in mixed ADC sacks).

5.3.2 Sacking and Labeling

Preparation sequence, sack size, and labeling:

a. 5-digit/scheme (optional, but required for 5-digit price); see 1.4c; scheme sort required, only for pieces meeting the automation-compatibility criteria in 301.3.0; minimum 10 addressed pieces; labeling:

   1. Line 1: For 5-digit scheme sacks, use L007, Column B. For 5-digit sacks, use city, state, and 5-digit ZIP Code on mail (see 4.5 for overseas military mail).

   2. Line 2: For 5-digit scheme sacks, “PSVC FLT 5D SCH NBC.” For 5-digit sacks, “PSVC FLT 5D NBC.”

b. 3-digit: required (20-piece minimum).

   1. Line 1: use L002, Column A.

   2. Line 2: “PSVC FLTS 3D NON BC.”

c. ADC: required (20-piece minimum).

   1. Line 1: use L004, Column B.

   2. Line 2: “PSVC FLTS ADC NON BC.”

d. Mixed ADC: required (no minimum).

   1. Line 1: Use L009, Column B.

   2. Line 2: “PSVC FLTS NON BC WKG.”