335   Mail Preparation

Overview

1.0   General Definition of Terms

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 and 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. The types of First-Class Mail listed below must not be part of the same mailing despite being in the same processing category (see 705.9.0, and 705.10.0, for advanced preparation options for flat-size mail):

   1. Automation price and any other type of mail.

   2. Presorted price and any other type of mail.

   3. Single-piece price and any other type of mail.

   4. Machinable and nonmachinable pieces.

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* flat tray is one that is physically full. Although a specific minimum volume is required (at least a single stack of mail lying flat on the bottom of the tray and filling the tray to the bottom of the handholds) before a tray may or must be prepared to the corresponding presort destination, trays must be filled with additional available pieces (up to the reasonable capacity of the tray) when standards require preparation of *full* trays.

c. A *less-than-full flat tray* is one that contains First-Class Mail for the same destination regardless of quantity or whether a full tray was previously prepared for that destination. Less-than-full flat trays may be prepared only if permitted by the standards for the price claimed.

d. An *overflow flat tray* is a less-than-full First-Class Mail tray that contains all pieces remaining after preparation of one or more full trays for the same destination. Overflow flat trays may be prepared only if permitted by the standards for the price claimed.

e. A *5-digit scheme sort for automation flats* yields 5-digit scheme bundles for those 5-digit ZIP Codes identified in L007. Presorting must be performed using L007. Pieces prepared in scheme bundles must meet the automation-compatibility criteria in 301.3.0. 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 by 5-digit ZIP Code 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. The 5-digit scheme sort is optional. 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.

f. An *origin 3-digit* (or *origin 3-digit scheme*) tray 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 must be prepared for each.

g. 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.

h. 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.

i. *Entry [facility]* (or *origin [facility]*) refers to the USPS mail processing facility (e.g., "entry SCF") 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.

j. 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.

k. A *bundle* is a group of addressed pieces secured together as a unit. Bundle preparation is described in 2.0.

l. 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 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.

m. *Cobundling* is an alternate preparation method available under 705.11.0 for First-Class Mail that allows the combining of flat-size automation price and Presorted price pieces within the same bundle under the single minimum bundle size requirement. Regardless of the class of mail, pieces may not be combined in more than one physical bundle for each logical presort destination unless presented using an approved manifest mailing system under 705.2.0.

2.0 Bundles

2.1 General

A *bundle* is a group of addressed pieces, for a presort destination, secured together as a unit. See 601.2.0 for bundling standards.

3.0 Flat Trays

3.1 Presort

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

3.2 Standard Containers

Mailings must be prepared in flat trays with green lids under 3.4, unless prepared in extended managed mail (EMM) trays under 3.5. 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 Flat Tray and Letter Tray Sizes

These approximate measurements define the USPS-provided tray sizes that apply to mail preparation standards in 3.4 and 3.5:

a. Flat tray. Inside bottom dimensions: 14-3/4 inches long by 10-3/4 inches wide. Height: 8 inches to bottom of handhold, 11-1/4 inches to top of tray.

b. Letter tray. 2-foot extended MM (EMM) trays: 21-3/4 inches long by 11-1/2 inches wide (inside bottom dimensions) by 6-1/8 inches high.

3.4 Preparation for Flats in Flat Trays

All flat tray preparation is subject to these standards:

a. Addresses on all pieces must face upward in the same direction.

b. Pieces must be placed in trays to maintain their orientation. Once the required minimum volume is reached to allow or require preparation of a tray, additional pieces must be placed in the same tray up to its capacity to minimize the number of trays used. When possible, pieces must be placed in two or more stacks to optimize tray use, but mail must not overfill the tray to inhibit adequate closure or covering of the content.

c. The weight of a tray and its content must not exceed 70 pounds.

d. Each tray must bear the correct tray label.

e. Each tray must be covered (with the green side of the lid facing up) and strapped under 3.4i.

f. For automation price mailings prepared under the optional tray-based preparation rules in 6.0, one less-than-full overflow tray may be prepared for a presort destination when the total number of pieces for that destination meets the minimum for preparation of the tray level, and when one or more full trays for that destination are also prepared.

g. For automation price mailings prepared under the optional tray-based preparation rules, if the total number of pieces for a presort destination meets or exceeds the minimum number of pieces required to prepare a tray for that destination, but the total volume does not physically fill a single tray, then the mail for that presort destination may be prepared in a less-than-full tray.

h. Pieces prepared as automation flats under the tray-based preparation option do not have to be grouped by 3-digit ZIP Code prefix in ADC trays or by ADC in mixed ADC trays if the mailing is prepared using an MLOCR/barcode sorter and standardized documentation is submitted.

i. Each flat tray must be covered with a lid. Each covered flat tray must then be secured with two straps placed tightly around the width of the tray (the shorter dimension).

3.5   Preparation for Flats in EMM Letter Trays

Mailers may prepare First-Class Mail flat-size pieces in EMM letter trays instead of flat trays if the following standards are met:

a. The pieces must fit completely within the dimensions for height, length, and width specified in 3.3b for an extended managed mail (EMM) letter tray. All pieces must be upright, faced toward the end of the tray (the short dimension), and perpendicular to the length of the tray.

b. Trays must bear tray-size labels that meet all applicable physical and barcode standards under 4.9, with Line 1 and Line 2 information as required for flat-size mail in flat trays. Each label must contain a barcode as specified in 708.6.3.3 and the content identifier number required in Exhibit 708.6.2.1 for the same type of flat-size mail prepared in flat trays.

c. All mail must be prepared under 6.6, and must not be prepared in bundles, except pieces in less-than-full trays must be bundled. Mailers using this option are not eligible to prepare their mail under 705.9.0.

d. All other applicable standards in 6.0, must be met, including required preparation sequence and use of tray minimums.

3.6   Origin/Entry 3-Digit/Scheme Trays

After all finer sort levels are prepared, an origin/entry 3-digit tray (or, if applicable, origin/entry 3-digit scheme tray) must be prepared to contain any remaining mail for each 3-digit (or 3-digit scheme) area serviced by the SCF serving the Post Office where the mail is verified (origin), and may be prepared for each 3-digit (or 3-digit scheme) area served by the SCF/plant where mail is entered (if that is different from the SCF/plant serving the Post Office where the mail is verified). In all cases, only one less-than-full tray may be prepared for each 3-digit (or 3-digit scheme) area.

4.0 Tray Labels

4.1 Basic Standards

Tray labels must contain all required elements applicable to the class and price category of the mailing. Labels must be legible (barcoded, machine printed labels recommended). Tray labels for automation mailings are subject to 4.9 and 708.6.2. Intelligent Mail tray labels are subject to the standards in 708.6.3, and to the specifications posted at http://ribbs.usps.gov.

4.2 Physical Characteristics of a Tray Label

A tray label must meet these specifications:

a. Color: white or manila.

b. Weight: minimum 70-pound stock (500 sheets, 24 by 36 inches).

c. Height (perpendicular to printing): 1.860 inches minimum; 2.015 inches maximum.

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

e. Thickness: 0.005 inch minimum.

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 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 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 tray and other information as specified by standards.

b. *Codes:* The codes shown below must be used as appropriate on Line 2 of tray labels.

CONTENT TYPE	CODE
Barcoded	BC
Barcoded and Nonbarcoded	BC/NBC
Digit	D
First-Class Mail	FCM
Flats	FLTS
General Delivery Unit	G
Highway Contract Route	H
Mixed	MXD
Nonbarcoded	NON BC
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 Placement of a Tray Label

A tray label must be securely placed in an adhesive-backed label holder that is affixed to the specific location designated on the tray. Where no specific location is indicated the label must be securely placed in an adhesive-backed label holder that

is affixed horizontally to the top left corner of one end of the tray. Do not use tape. Insert labels completely into the label holder to ensure that they do not fall out during processing. Do not insert labels upside down.

4.9   Barcoded Tray Labels

4.9.1 Basic Standards for Barcoded Tray Labels

Exhibit 4.9.1 shows the types of mail requiring barcoded tray labels. Barcoded labels must meet these general standards:

a.   Use 2-inch labels.

b.   All information on barcoded labels must be machine-printed. Alterations to preprinted barcoded labels (e.g., handwritten changes) may not be made.

c.   Barcoded labels must be inserted completely into the label holder on the tray to prevent their loss during transport and processing.

d.   Mailer-produced barcoded labels must meet the standards in 708.6.0.

e.   Intelligent Mail Tray labels must be used with mailings entered under the full-service automation option (see 705.23.0).

Exhibit 4.9.1 Required Barcoded Container Labels

PRICE OR TYPE	PROCESSING CATEGORY
First-Class Mail	
Automation price	Flat-size
Cobundled and cotrayed under 705.9.0 through 705.13.0	Flat-size

5.0   Preparation of Nonautomation Flats

5.1   Basic Standards

Each Presorted First-Class Mail mailing must be prepared under 5.0 and 333.3.0. All pieces must be in the flat-size processing category. Flat-size pieces must be prepared in flat trays. All pieces must be marked "Presorted" and "First-Class."

5.2   Single-Piece Price Pieces Presented With Presort Mailings

Regardless of the method of postage payment, pieces of single-piece price First-Class Mail may be presented with and reported on the same postage statement as pieces claimed at automation or presort prices if the single-piece price pieces are physically separated from other pieces; bear no price marking, or are marked only "First-Class," or (if not affixed with full single-piece price 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 price marking) have all additional postage paid at the time of mailing. Mailers must label the trays under 708.6.0 using CIN code 282 on single-piece trays. Label the trays as follows:

a.   Line 1: Use L201; for mail originating in ZIP Code areas in Column A, use "MXD" followed by city, state, and 3-digit ZIP Code prefix in Column C (use "MXD" instead of "OMX" in the destination line and ignore Column B).

b.   Line 2: Use the human-readable content line corresponding to content identifier number 282 (see Exhibit 708.6.2.4).

c.   Line 3: Office of mailing or mailer information.

5.3   Nonautomation Pieces

Nonautomation flats must use the preparation sequence and tray labeling in 5.4 and 5.5.

5.4   Bundling and Labeling

Except under 601.2.14, bundling is required before traying. 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 under 601.2.12 and for mixed ADC bundles. Preparation sequence, bundle size (except allowed under 601.2.12), 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.

5.5   Traying and Labeling

Preparation sequence, tray size, and labeling:

a.   5-digit (required); full trays (no overflow); labeling:

1.   Line 1: city, state, and 5-digit ZIP Code on mail (see 4.3c for overseas military mail).

2.   Line 2: "FCM FLTS 5D NON BC."

b.   3-digit (required); full trays (no overflow), except for one less-than-full tray for each origin 3-digit(s); labeling:

1.   Line 1: L002, Column A.

2.   Line 2: "FCM FLTS 3D NON BC."

c.   ADC (required); full trays (no overflow); labeling:

1.   Line 1: L004, Column B.

2.   Line 2: "FCM FLTS ADC NON BC."

d.   Mixed ADC (required); no minimum; labeling:

1.   Line 1: Use L201; for mail originating in ZIP Code areas in Column A, use "MXD" followed by city, state, and 3-digit ZIP Code prefix in Column C (use "MXD" instead of "OMX" in the destination line and ignore Column B).

2.   Line 2: "FCM FLTS NON BC WKG."

5.6   Cotraying and Cobundling With Automation Price Mail

Except for automation price mailings prepared under the tray-based preparation option in 6.6, if a single mailing job contains an automation price mailing and a Presorted price mailing and both mailings are reported on the same postage

statement, then the mailing job must be presorted under the cotraying standards in 705.9.0. Flat-size Presorted price pieces may be cobundled with flat-size automation price pieces under the standards in 705.11.0.

6.0 Preparation of Automation Flats

6.1 Basic Standards

Automation First-Class Mail must be prepared under 6.0 and meet the eligibility standards for the price claimed; trays must bear the appropriate barcoded container labels under 708.6.0. Flat-size pieces must be prepared in flat trays.

6.2 Mailings

6.2.1 Automation Pieces

All pieces in a mailing must be sorted together to the finest extent required. First-Class Mail mailings may include pieces prepared at automation 5-digit, 3-digit, ADC, and mixed ADC prices. The definitions of a mailing and permissible combinations are in 1.2.

6.2.2 Single-Piece

Regardless of the method of postage payment, single-piece First-Class Mail may be presented with and reported on the same postage statement as pieces claimed at automation or presort prices if the single pieces are physically separated from other pieces; bear no price marking, or are marked only "First-Class," or (if not affixed with full single-piece 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 price marking) have all additional postage paid at the time of mailing.

6.3 Marking

All automation pieces must be marked under 302. Pieces claimed at an automation price must bear the appropriate class marking. Pieces not claimed at an automation price must not bear "AUTO" unless single-piece postage is affixed or a corrective single-piece marking ("single-piece" or "SNGLP") is applied.

6.4 General Preparation

Except for First-Class Mail prepared under 6.6, all pieces must be prepared in bundles. Bundles may contain 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. Price eligibility is not affected when a physical bundle contains fewer pieces than the minimum bundle size for the above reasons.

6.5 First-Class Mail Required Bundle-Based Preparation

6.5.1 Bundling and Labeling

Preparation sequence, bundle size (except as allowed under 601.2.12), and labeling:

a. 5-digit scheme (optional, as described in 6.7); 10-piece minimum; red Label 5 SCH or optional endorsement line (OEL).

b. 5-digit (optional, but required for 5-digit price eligibility); 10-piece minimum; red Label 5 or optional endorsement line (OEL).

c. 3-digit (required); 10-piece minimum; green Label 3 or OEL.

d. ADC (required); 10-piece minimum; pink Label A or OEL.

e. Mixed ADC (required); no minimum; tan Label X or OEL.

6.5.2 Traying and Labeling
Preparation sequence, tray size, and labeling:

a. 5-digit (optional, but required for 5-digit price eligibility); full trays (no overflow); labeling:

   1. Line 1: city, state, and 5-digit ZIP Code on mail (see 708.6.0, for overseas military mail).

   2. Line 2: "FCM FLTS 5D BC."

b. 3-digit (required); full trays (no overflow); labeling:

   1. Line 1: L002, Column A.

   2. Line 2: "FCM FLTS 3D BC."

c. Origin 3-digit(s) (required); no minimum; labeling:

   1. Line 1: L002, Column A.

   2. Line 2: "FCM FLTS 3D BC."

d. ADC (required); full trays (no overflow); labeling:

   1. Line 1: L004, Column B.

   2. Line 2: "FCM FLTS ADC BC."

e. Mixed ADC (required); no minimum; labeling:

   1. Line 1: Use L201; for mail originating in ZIP Code areas in Column A, use "MXD" followed by city, state, and 3-digit ZIP Code prefix in Column C. (Use "MXD" instead of "OMX" in the destination line and ignore Column B).

   2. Line 2: "FCM FLTS BC WKG."

6.6   First-Class Mail Optional Tray-Based Preparation
Tray size, preparation sequence, and Line 1 labeling:

a. 5-digit: optional, but 5-digit trays required for price eligibility (90-piece minimum); one less-than-full or overflow tray allowed; for Line 1, use city, state, and 5-digit ZIP Code destination of pieces (for military mail see 4.3c). (Preparation to qualify for 5-digit price is optional and need not be done for all 5-digit destinations.)

b. 3-digit: required (90-piece minimum); one less-than-full or overflow tray allowed; for Line 1, use L002, Column A for 3-digit destinations.

c. Origin 3-digit: required for each 3-digit ZIP Code served by the SCF of the origin (verification) office; no minimum; for Line 1, use L002, Column A for 3-digit destinations.

d. ADC: required (90-piece minimum); one less-than-full or overflow tray allowed; group pieces by 3-digit ZIP Code prefix; for Line 1, use L004 (ZIP Code prefixes in Column A must be combined and labeled to the corresponding ADC destination shown in Column B). As an exception, pieces do *not* have to be grouped by 3-digit ZIP Code prefix in ADC trays if the mailing is prepared using a MLOCR/barcode sorter and standardized documentation is submitted.

e. Mixed ADC (required); no minimum for price eligibility. Group pieces by ADC. For Line 1 use L201; for mail originating in ZIP Code areas in Column A, use "MXD" followed by city, state, and 3-digit ZIP Code prefix in Column C (use "MXD" instead of "OMX" in the destination line and ignore Column B). Mailers using a MLOCR/barcode sorter and submitting standardized documentation need not group pieces by ADC.

6.7 5-Digit Scheme Bundle Preparation

Pieces meeting the automation-compatibility criteria in 301.3.0, may be prepared in 5-digit scheme bundles for those 5-digit ZIP Code combinations identified in L007. These bundles must meet the additional standards in 1.4e.

6.8 Cotraying and Cobundling With Presorted Price Mail

Except for mailings prepared under the tray-based preparation option in 6.6, if the mailing job contains an automation mailing and a Presorted mailing and both mailings are reported on the same postage statement, then the mailing job must be prepared under the cotraying standards in 705.9.0. Automation pieces may be cobundled with Presorted pieces under the standards in 705.11.0.