

US Postal Laws & Regulations

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Mail delivery



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will be disregarded; the husband of an addressee will be presumed her agent when she has not directed her mail to be withheld from his control.

4. A general request to forward matter should be observed until revoked.

5. The direction may be changed and matter reforwarded upon request as many times as may be necessary to reach the addressee.

6. Matter entitled thereto should be promptly forwarded in the next mail. (As to special-delivery matter, see section 694.)

7. Penalty envelopes must not be used to forward letters; but if there be insufficient space to write correction of address, a piece of paper should be attached for the purpose.

As to forwarding registered matter, see sections 1111 and 1113.

Sec. 563. Erroneously Addressed or Delivered Matter, &c.; when to be Forwarded.—When any article of mail matter has been erroneously delivered, it may, on being returned to the post-office, be forwarded upon due request, as if it had not passed from the post-office. Any matter proper to be forwarded free, addressed to the care of another, and returned by him redirected, may be forwarded in like manner. Matter which has been opened inadvertently upon misdelivery may be forwarded. As postal cars, mail apartments in cars and steamboats, are designated as post-offices, a deposit in such car or apartment, at the post-office originally addressed, of unopened letters properly readdressed for forwarding, is permissible; and the deposit in a letter box established by the Department, is equivalent to a deposit in the post-office.

The postmaster will correct and forward to its known destination any matter of the first and second classes which comes to his office through obvious mistake of the sender in addressing it, but should not guess at the destination, nor forward it on trial. If sure that it can be delivered from the office to which he sends it, he will postmark it and indorse: "DEFICIENCY IN ADDRESS SUPPLIED BY" (name of forwarding office).

Sec. 564. Letters under Cover to Postmasters.—Postmasters will forward all first-class matter on which one full rate of postage is prepaid which may reach them under cover from any other post-office with or without request to mail the same. Before forwarding, they should cancel the stamps and indorse in writing or stamp on such matter the following: "RECEIVED AT _____, UNDER COVER FROM THE POST-OFFICE AT _____."

DELIVERY OF ORDINARY MAIL MATTER.

Sec. 565. Must be from Post-Offices.—Mail matter must be delivered from post-offices. Railway postal clerks will not, in any case, deliver matter

to the persons addressed. It must be sent to and delivered at the office of address. The exceptions to this rule are the following:

1. Matter addressed to a discontinued office may be delivered from the nearest office thereto.

2. When a letter from a foreign country arrives, not in a closed mail, directed to a post-office other than that at the port of arrival, and the person addressed so specially desires, the postmaster at the port of arrival may deliver him the letter upon being satisfied of his identity.

3. Any ambassador or other diplomatic representative of a foreign government may, on his request, personally receive his mail matter from any post-office through which it may be passing, the postmaster being sure of his identity.

4. A postmaster at whose office mail matter in transit is lying, delayed by floods or other casualties which have made the mail route impassable, may deliver matter to the parties addressed, upon their personal or written application, and sure identification.

5. Railway postal clerks may deliver to any post-office inspector, who may enter their postal cars, any mail matter addressed to such inspector, when sure of his identity by seeing his commission.

Sec. 566. General Directions for Delivery.—The following general directions are given for the delivery of mail matter:

1. The delivery in each case should be to the person addressed, or according to his order. Such order may be implied in some cases, as where the addressee is in the habit of sending for or receiving his mail through his clerk, servant, agent, or some member of his family, and recognizing or acquiescing in such delivery.

2. When a person requests delivery to him of the mail of another, claiming that the addressee has verbally given him authority to receive it, the postmaster, if he doubts the authority, may require it to be in writing, signed and filed in his office.

3. When in doubt as to the identity of the addressee the postmaster may require proof, and should exercise great care, especially where the matter appears to be of value, to make proper delivery, as he is in peril of liability for damages to the proper party if he misdelivers.

4. Where two or more persons of the same name receive mail at the same office the postmaster should advise them to adopt some address or means by which their mail may be distinguished. He will deliver according to his best judgment; and will not return it to the mailing office for better description of the addressee, until, after inquiry, he is unable to determine to whom it should be delivered.

5. Mail matter addressed to a person in care of another should be delivered to the addressee, if he so direct, rather than to the person to

whose care it is addressed. In the absence of such direction, it should be delivered to the first of the two persons who may call for it.

6. Mail matter addressed to several persons may be delivered to any one of them.

7. Mail matter addressed to a public official, or to an officer of a corporation, by his official title, should be delivered to the person actually holding the office designated in the address, the presumption being that the matter was intended for the officer as such, rather than the individual named. This regulation also applies to the delivery of letters addressed to persons as "agent" or "agents," when the agency is of some public matter or of the business of some corporation, but not when the agency is merely of an individual or firm.

8. Neither husband nor wife can control the delivery of correspondence addressed to the other. When so instructed, a postmaster must refuse to deliver letters to the husband which are addressed to the wife, or those to the wife which are addressed to the husband. In the absence of instructions to the contrary, the wife's letters should be placed in the husband's box, and delivered to him with his own letters unless known to live separately.

9. A person engaged in a legitimate business may adopt a business name, and when duly identified, may receive his mail, registered or ordinary, by that name, as well as by his proper name.

For SPECIAL RULES GOVERNING DELIVERY OF REGISTERED MATTER, see sections 1116 to 1128.

Sec. 567. Official Letters to Pensioners.—A letter from the Pension Office, in Washington, D. C., may be delivered to the person in whose care it may be addressed, as well as to the pensioner or a member of his family; but a letter addressed to a pensioner from the office of an agent for paying pensions must be delivered to the pensioner or some member of his family, even though addressed in the care of a third person; because such address is prohibited. A pensioner's order, verbal or written, instructing the postmaster to deliver letters to him from a pension agent, or from the Pension Office, to an attorney, claim agent, or broker, must be disregarded. If a communication from the Commissioner of Pensions, or a pension agent, addressed to a pensioner, reaches a post-office after the pensioner has died, leaving no surviving widow or children under sixteen years of age, the postmaster should return the communication to the office from which it came, or to the Commissioner of Pensions, Washington, D. C., with a statement of the fact. If there be a surviving widow, the letter should be delivered to her. If no widow, then to the guardian, if any, of the children surviving under sixteen years of age.

Sec. 568. Mail Matter Addressed to Minors.—Where minor children reside with their parents, the father, or if he be dead, the mother generally is entitled to direct the disposition of mail matter addressed to such minors, and unless the minors be under guardianship, may authorize another to receive mail matter addressed to them, although they be not residing with the parent, and the postmaster should deliver accordingly, requiring directions in writing if he deem it necessary. In the absence of directions from a parent or guardian, or one authorized to control his correspondence, mail matter addressed to a minor may be delivered to him; and, especially if living independently, he is entitled to control his correspondence. Mail matter addressed to a deceased minor, who up to the time of decease resided with parents or guardian, may be delivered to the parent or guardian; but if the minor left a husband or widow, delivery may be made to him or her.

Sec. 569. Mail Matter Addressed to Deceased Persons.—Mail matter addressed to a deceased person must be delivered to his legal representative; if there be none, delivery may be made to a surviving husband or widow, unless there be other claimants, in which event the postmaster should report the facts of the case to the First Assistant Postmaster-General, and await instructions. If there be no legal representative, surviving husband, or widow, and others claim such mail matter, it should be sent to the Dead-Letter Office with the return of unclaimed matter, with a statement of the facts. (See section 607.)

Sec. 570. Partnerships and Corporations.—

1. Mail matter addressed to a firm may be delivered to any member of it.

2. The postmaster is not required to decide disputes between members of an existing firm as to delivery of its matter. If it has previously been through box or general delivery, he will continue to place the mail therein; if through carrier, he will instruct the carrier to hand the mail matter to any of the members of the firm.

3. If the firm be dissolved and contention arise, the postmaster's action will be governed by section five hundred and seventy-one.

4. Mail matter addressed to a corporation should be delivered to the agent or officer conducting its correspondence, or to such person as is authorized by the corporation to receive it.

5. Caution should be exercised to resist all attempts to secure the mail of an established house, firm, or corporation through the adoption by others of a similar name. Where disputes arise between individuals, firms, or corporations as to the use of a name or designation, the postmaster should deliver any matter addressed to a street, number, or building according to such address. When not so addressed, he will deliver

matter to the firm or corporation which first adopted the name of the address at that place. When in doubt as to the firm or corporation for which any mail matter is intended, and claim therefor is disputed, the postmaster may withhold delivery and report the facts and any statements made by either claimant to the First Assistant Postmaster-General for advice.

Sec. 571. Postmaster to Require Appointment of Receiver.—When a firm or company dissolves partnership, and contention arises as to whom the mail matter addressed to the former business firm or company, or its officials, shall be delivered, a postmaster, being forbidden by one party to deliver to another, should require the appointment of a receiver, retaining all mail matter until said receiver is appointed; and if no such receiver is appointed, or no agreement between the contending parties is reached, before the expiration of thirty days from the date when delivery ceased, the letters in dispute, and all that may arrive thereafter (until an agreement is made or receiver appointed), shall be sent to the Dead-Letter Office marked **IN DISPUTE**.

Sec. 572. Delivery to Assignee or Receiver.—Upon the dissolution of a corporation its mail matter should be delivered to the receiver or legal representative charged with the duty of winding up its affairs. When the business of a firm, corporation, or individual has passed into the hands of an assignee or receiver, the mail matter addressed to such firm, corporation, or individual should be delivered to the assignee or receiver in the following cases:

1. When the instrument of assignment authorizes the assignee to receive it and a copy thereof is filed with the postmaster; or
2. When the order of the court by which such receiver was appointed directs him to receive it; or
3. When the members of the firm, officers of the corporation, or person to whom the mail is addressed consent that he shall receive it; or
4. When the firm or corporation has not resumed business under the same name, so as to have correspondence in regard to business or property which did not pass to the assignee or receiver; or
5. When the receiver has been appointed to take charge of, continue, or wind up the business of an existing corporation.

The mail matter should be delivered to the firm or person instead of the assignee or receiver—

1. When the person making the assignment has not consented or agreed that the assignee shall receive mail matter addressed to him, the assignor, and arriving after the assignment, or when it reasonably appears that the matter does not relate to the business assigned.
2. When the firm whose business has been placed in the receiver's

hands is engaged in conducting a new or other business under the former name, or has subsequently acquired or has other property that does not pass into the receiver's hands. In such cases it will be presumed that the mail matter relates to the new or other business.

3. When the order of the court by which the receiver is appointed directs that the mail matter shall be delivered to the person, firm, or some officer of the corporation, instead of the receiver.

Sec. 573. Delivery according to Agreement of Parties.—When parties interested in mail matter enter into an agreement as to its delivery, and instruct the postmaster as to whom he shall deliver it, he will deliver accordingly until his instructions are changed by mutual consent of the parties, or until the judgment or order otherwise of a court of competent jurisdiction. He may require the instructions to be in writing.

This rule governs the case of the sale of a business. The postmaster is not required to construe the contract or determine rights, but only to comply with such plain directions as may be given by the seller, in their absence delivering to the addressee. The authority to the vendee is not revocable by the seller if there be a right to the mail in the vendee.

574. To Fictitious Addresses.—Letters and packages addressed to fictitious persons and firms, to initials, or to no particular person or firm, unless directed to be delivered at a designated place, as a post-office box, street, and number, or to the care of a certain person or firm, within the delivery of the post-office, are undeliverable, and must be sent to the Dead-Letter Office, as prescribed by section six hundred and two, unless the envelope contain the card of the sender, or a request to return, in which case the letters or packages should be returned accordingly.

Whenever a postmaster has reason to believe that a street or number, designated place, box, or address in care of another is being used by any one for conducting, under a fictitious address, correspondence forbidden circulation in the mails, he should promptly report the fact and the reason for his belief to the First Assistant Postmaster-General, and await his instructions, giving notice at the same time at the place where such letters and packages have been received that, pending instructions from the Department, the claimant of such matter must call at the general delivery to receive it, where it is the duty of the postmaster to have it placed, and to deliver it to the person calling for it, upon establishing his identity.

Sec. 575. To Agent of Club.—Any number of citizens may employ an agent, and give him a written order on the postmaster for their mail; and when such order is presented to the postmaster, it is his duty to deliver the mail of such parties, and also mail addressed to a person