

US Postal Laws & Regulations

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Safety of the mails



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the contractor of the failure, if his address be known, and require him to take measures to prevent its recurrence.

Sec. 858. Reports; how Sent and Preserved.—The regular reports above required must be sent by the first mail after the close of each month to the Second Assistant Postmaster-General (Division of Inspection), and a duplicate retained by the postmaster and carefully preserved to be turned over to his successor. In case of failure to receive the report at the Department, a duplicate will be called for and must be promptly sent. Neglect to send reports or duplicates when called for will be ground for removal; as delays in payment of contractors and obstruction to the service are caused thereby.

Sec. 859. Contractors to Make Specific Excuses for each Delinquency.—Should a mail at any time fail to arrive at the end of a route, or at any intermediate post-office, where the time of arrival is fixed, within the time specified in the contract or schedule, the contractor must immediately, by himself or agent, send his excuse, if he have any, to the Second Assistant Postmaster-General (Division of Inspection), setting forth particularly the cause of the failure. A specific excuse is required for each delinquency of a contractor, and mere general allegations will not be admitted. If bad roads be alleged, a specific report must be made of what portion of the road was so bad as to obstruct the mails, and what its peculiar condition was; if high waters, it must be shown what water-courses were impassable; and so of all other excuses. If part of the trip only was performed, the report must show what part, and give the distance traveled, and the reason, fully detailed, for failure to make the other part.

CHAPTER THIRTY.

OF MAIL EQUIPMENTS.

MAIL BAGS.

Sec. 860. Term "Mail Bags" Includes—

Mail Pouches (used for every mode of conveyance excepting horse back), of five different sizes, the largest being No. 1.

Horse Mail Bags (for horseback service only), of three different sizes, the largest being No. 1.

Mail-Catcher Pouches (of one size only), designed exclusively for exchange of mails on railways by catchers and cranes.

Jute-Canvas Mail Sacks (not locked, but tied with cord), designed for printed and third and fourth class matter not registered.

Through Registered Mail Pouches, of sizes No. 1 and 2, used, where authorized, for exchanges of direct pouches of only registered matter.

Inner Registered Mail Sacks, of sizes No. 1, 2, 3, and 4, used, where authorized, for direct bagging of only registered matter.

Foreign Mail Sacks (of blue striped cotton canvas) of sizes Nos. 0, 1, 2, and 3, used only for despatching mails to foreign countries.

Foreign Registered Mail Sacks (made of blue striped cotton canvas), of sizes No. 0, 1, 2, and 3, used only for despatching registered matter to foreign countries.

Coin Mail Sacks, one size, for sending money-order funds in coin.

Sec. 861. *How Provided.*—Mail bags are manufactured for the Department, under contracts, securing uniformity of pattern, quality, and size. They are furnished by the Department for the needs of the postal service; and are not to be purchased by postmasters or mail contractors; and no allowance will be made for such purchases by them unless made under special instructions from the Department.

Sec. 862. *Every Mail Route must be Supplied with Mail Bags.*—Every mail route must always be duly provided with suitable mail bags and locks, in good and safe condition. Postmasters, especially those at the ends of routes, must see to this, and promptly make application for such as are needed. It is their duty to look constantly to the condition of mail bags in use, permitting none to be used which are too much worn or otherwise unsafe, and to report any damage discovered to have been done to them, whether through accident, negligence, or design, while in the custody of carriers.

A separate mail bag for letters, or for any registered matter, is not to be provided or used for any intermediate post-office on a "star route," it being the duty of the postmaster at every intermediate post-office, chiefly on account of the regulations relating to registered matter in transit, to receive and dispatch letters and all registered matter in one locked pouch, which is to be used and opened at every intermediate post-office throughout the route; no separation of registered matter in transit being allowed, except in cases in which a separate through pouch, under the brass lock, for ordinary and registered mail matter, destined for the terminal office and points beyond, may be authorized by special instructions from the Third Assistant Postmaster-General. This rule, however, does not apply to the use of tied canvas sacks for printed and third and fourth class matter, not registered, which, on account of its bulk, it may in some cases be necessary and convenient to separate for intermediate post-offices on a "star route."

Sec. 863. *Applications for Mail Bags.*—Applications for mail bags must be made to the Second Assistant Postmaster-General (Division of Mail

Equipments), and must state why they are needed, the number, size, and capacity of each, the number of the mail route (or its terminal points), and the mode of conveyance thereon. Bags received with mail matter must not be withheld from return; but timely application must be made before those in use become too much worn for safety, and the old ones must be sent to the nearest depository on receipt of new ones.

Sec. 864. Legitimate Use of Mail Bags Restricted.—The legitimate use of mail bags is restricted to the transmission of mailable matter while under the care, custody, and control of the Post-Office Department, through its postmasters and other authorized agents. Their application to any other uses than those of this Department is illegal and strictly forbidden. The stealing, purloining, converting from proper use, or conveying away, to the detriment of the service, of any mail bags, is an offense by law, punishable with fine and imprisonment. (See section 1455.)

The use of mail bags as receptacles for waste paper or office sweepings is prohibited.

The experimental use in the postal service of alleged improvements in mail bags or other mail equipments, patented or not, is forbidden, unless specially authorized by an order from the Postmaster-General.

Sec. 865. Canvas Sacks may be Taken by Publishers.—Whenever, in any post-office in the large towns and cities, there is an extreme necessity of extending to publishers the privilege of taking canvas sacks to their printing offices to be there filled with printed matter for the mails, the postmaster must keep an exact account with each publisher of the number of sacks taken from and returned to his post office on every occasion. Besides the account kept in the post-office for that purpose, pass-books should be used between the several printing offices and the post-office. No sacks should be delivered for any publisher, except on presentation of his pass-book, in which he is to be debited with the number of sacks intrusted to him and credited with the number returned; and for the due return of all sacks so intrusted to him each publisher shall be held responsible.

Sec. 866. Sacks Containing Public Documents.—Postmasters, especially those at the places of residence of members of Congress (to whose post-offices canvas sacks containing public documents are sent from Washington, D. C.), must see that all such sacks are emptied and sent back to the post-office in the latter place.

In like manner mail sacks containing post-office supplies sent from the Department must be emptied and returned.

In the transmission of empty mail bags of any kind, they should always have inside a slip showing plainly whence they were transmitted,

and be duly labeled for their destination. Empty mail bags in transit, duly labeled, should never be diverted from their destination as labeled.

Sec. 867. Canadian Mail Bags.—All mail bags received from Canada must be promptly returned empty, pursuant to arrangements made with that country, and all postmasters and other officers and employés are prohibited from any use of such bags.

Sec. 868. Equal Exchange or Reciprocal Return of Locked Pouches.—All exchanges of locked pouches between post-offices should be as nearly equalized in frequency and quantities as circumstances will admit, and all extra pouches received with mail matter are required to be promptly returned whence they were received, whether there is mail matter to send back in them or not.

Sec. 869. Waste or Abuse of Mail Bags to be Prevented.—It is the duty of postmasters and other agents of this Department to prevent, whenever in their power, any waste or abuse of mail bags; to reclaim them from improper hands; and to give information of every instance of theft or illegal use of mail bags coming to their knowledge.

Sec. 870. Fastening Strap Never to be Cut.—The fastening strap of a mail bag should never be cut; but if ever done, the strap must not afterwards be spliced, but a new one put on instead of the strap cut. When the staple is cut asunder, the bag should have a new one applied before being used again.

Sec. 871. What Mutilation of a Mail Bag may be Allowed.—When a mail bag has a damaged or defective lock upon it, which cannot be opened with the proper key in good order, such lock should be removed without further damage, where there are a bag and lock in good condition to substitute for them, by filing or cutting asunder that staple of the bag to which the lock is fastened. No other mutilation of a mail bag is admissible under any circumstances whatever, except by railway postal clerks, as authorized in section nine hundred and fifty-three. When the staple is cut, the mail bag must not be used again until a new staple shall have been applied to it.

The cutting, mutilation, or tying into hard knots, of the regulation lacing cord on canvas mail sacks, or the willful detachment of the fasteners therefrom, are positively forbidden.

All cord fasteners which may accidentally become detached, or which may have been removed from worn out sacks, should be promptly sent from time to time to the Second Assistant Postmaster-General (Mail Equipment Division).

Sec. 872. Register of Outgoing and Incoming Mails to be Kept.—In all post-offices where many lock pouches are sent and received daily, such a register of the outgoing and incoming mails should be kept as will show

the places to which separate locked pouches are sent and from which they are received, as well as the number sent to and received from each daily. Postmasters will give particular attention to keeping such registers, and will be guided by the same in correcting all disparities in their exchanges of locked pouches.

Sec. 873. Repairs of Mail Bags by Postmasters, &c.—When a mail bag in use becomes so damaged as to require slight repairs, and the postmaster at the end of the route where it first arrives in that condition has not a good bag to substitute for it, he must immediately have it repaired at a reasonable cost, charging the amount paid therefor in his account of contingent expenses, and sending to the Auditor with his quarterly returns a bill and receipt rendered by the mender of the bag as a proper voucher for the allowance of the moneys so paid and charged by him. In having repairs of mail bags done, the postmaster should direct the person performing the work to specify in his bill, whenever practicable, the number of each size of every kind of mail bags repaired, and the nature and price of repairs done to each.

Sec. 874. Mail Bag in Transit becoming Unsound.—In case a mail bag in transit becomes too unsound to convey the mail with safety to the end of the route, the postmaster first discovering its bad condition must have it repaired immediately, even if he has no suitable mail bag to substitute for it, and must therefore detain the mail until the needful repairs can be done. Postmasters whose post-offices are not mail-bag depositories should not have surplus mail bags repaired, but such bags only as are in demand for immediate use.

Sec. 875. Names of Depositories for Mail Bags and Locks.—The following post-offices are depositories for mail bags and locks, where mail bags and locks, new and old, are collected and distributed, under special instructions from the Second Assistant Postmaster-General: *Portland and Bangor, Maine; Concord, New Hampshire; Rutland, Vermont; Boston, Massachusetts; Providence, Rhode Island; Hartford and New Haven, Connecticut; New York, Albany, and Buffalo, New York; Trenton, New Jersey; Philadelphia, Harrisburg, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Baltimore, Maryland; Washington, District of Columbia; Richmond, Virginia; Wheeling, West Virginia; Raleigh, North Carolina; Charleston and Columbia, South Carolina; Atlanta and Savannah, Georgia; Tallahassee, Florida; Mobile and Montgomery, Alabama; Jackson, Mississippi; New Orleans, Louisiana; Little Rock, Arkansas; Nashville and Memphis, Tennessee; Louisville, Kentucky; Cincinnati and Cleveland, Ohio; Detroit, Michigan; Indianapolis, Indiana; Springfield and Chicago, Illinois; Saint Louis, Missouri; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Des Moines and Dubuque, Iowa; Saint Paul, Minnesota; Galveston, Texas; San Francisco, Cali-*

*for*nia; *Portland, Oregon*; *Salt Lake City, Utah Territory*; *Lawrence, Kansas*; *Omaha, Nebraska*; and *Denver, Colorado*.

Sec. 876. Accounts of Depository Post-Offices to be Rendered.—It is the duty of every postmaster whose post-office is a depository for mail bags and locks to render to the office of the Second Assistant Postmaster-General (Division of Mail Equipments) an account at the end of every month showing the number of each kind of mail locks and of each size of the several kinds of mail bags on hand at the beginning of and received during the month, of those furnished to other post-offices, of those in actual use in his post-office, and of those remaining on hand not in use, but ready for distribution. Blanks for this purpose will be furnished, from time to time, on application to the Second Assistant Postmaster-General (Division of Mail Equipments).

Sec. 877. Surplus Stock to be Kept Apart from the Current Stock.—Each postmaster at a depository for mail bags and locks must be careful to keep apart from the mail bags and locks required for current use of his post-office all surplus articles of that kind, and to consider them as deposited for distribution in such manner as may be directed by the Department. For all mail bags and locks so distributed he will obtain receipts, which are to be transmitted immediately to the Department. He may withdraw mail bags and locks from the surplus stock on deposit to supply wants of his own post-office, and requisitions of the Railway Mail Service, but not to supply other post-offices, without special instructions, except in emergencies admitting of no delay. For mail bags so withdrawn from deposit, his certificate in the former case, and receipts in the latter, must be transmitted to the Department, where, when received, they will be entered to his credit.

Sec. 878. Damaged Mail Bags at Mail-Bag Depositories.—Postmasters whose post-offices are mail bag depositories are not authorized to have repairs done to mail bags collected in their post-offices, but are required to send all damaged mail bags to the established repair shops, under such special instructions as may from time to time be received from the Second Assistant Postmaster-General.

Sec. 879. Surplus Mail Bags not to Accumulate.—Surplus mail bags must not be allowed to accumulate and fall into disuse in any post-office not a depository for mail bags. All such, whether in good condition or not, if not returned whence received, must be forwarded to the nearest mail-bag depository.

MAIL LOCKS AND KEYS.

Sec. 880. Mail Locks and Keys, by whom Furnished.—Mail locks and keys are furnished from the office of the Second Assistant Postmaster-

General (Division of Mail Equipments). Applications for mail locks or keys must always assign the reasons therefor.

Sec. 881. Care of Mail Keys—Penalty for Loss.—The careful use of mail locks and the safe keeping of mail keys are essential to the integrity of the postal service. The mail key must never be exposed to public observation nor placed where it may be lost or stolen, nor suffered to pass, even for a moment, into the hands of any person not authorized by the Department to use mail keys. The safe keeping of the mail-key is one of the expressed conditions of the official bond of every postmaster. The loss of a mail key, as it may afford peculiar facilities for stealing from the mails, is an act of carelessness likely to be more pernicious to the service than almost any other a postmaster or agent of the Department can commit. It is therefore deemed sufficient cause for removing the postmaster or agent so offending, enforcing the penalty of the official bond of the former, and even in certain cases for discontinuing the post-office.

To afford adequate means for the safe keeping of mail keys, and leave no possible excuse for their being lost or even mislaid by postmasters, safety-chains have been provided by the Department to be used in the following manner :

1. Every mail key must be kept attached to the safety-chain, from which it must never be removed until the key, from defect, damage, or other cause, is to be returned to the Department.

2. Every post-office must use a table upon which the mails received are to be emptied, and to which all locked mail bags are to be brought for opening.

3. One end of the safety-chain must always be kept screwed fast to the inside of the drawer of such table, and both the chain and the key are to be kept therein when not in actual use.

4. Such table (with a drawer) must be provided in every post-office of the third or fourth class, without expense to the *Department*, and in every case of refusal or failure on the part of a postmaster to so provide and use such table the post-office *will be discontinued*, rather than suffer the mail key to be exposed to risk of being lost or mislaid by a disregard of this requisite precaution for its safety.

Sec. 882. Mail Keys to have a Specific Number.—The mail keys bear, each of them, a different number stamped upon them. Every postmaster or employé to whom such keys are intrusted will be charged therewith and held to a strict account therefor. On the receipt of any such mail key by a postmaster, he should make a record, to be kept in his post-office, of the date of its receipt and of the number stamped upon it. Whenever such or any other mail key shall afterwards be referred

to in any communication to the Department, its number must invariably be specified. Every casualty whatever concerning a mail key must be promptly reported to the Second Assistant Postmaster-General (Mail Equipment Division).

Sec. 883. Exchange of Mail Keys by Railway Mail Employés.—In all cases of an exchange of routes between employés of the Railway Mail Service, there must also be an exchange of mail keys between them, so that every mail key shall always be retained in the particular office for which it was originally furnished by the Department, and never be taken away for use elsewhere.

Sec. 884. Receipts to be Always Taken for Mail Keys.—No mail key shall be transferred or exchanged except to a successor in office, nor be furnished nor loaned without special instructions from the Department. No such key, not obtained directly from the Department or from a predecessor in office, shall be kept or detained, but promptly returned to the Department, with a full report of facts in relation to it. If a mail key be received from a discontinued post-office, or elsewhere, it must be sent without delay to the Department by the postmaster receiving it, stating when and from whom it was received by him. Whenever a retiring postmaster turns over a mail key, he must obtain and transmit to the Second Assistant Postmaster-General a receipt for the same, specifying the number stamped upon it, in order that he may receive due credit on the books of the Department, and he and his sureties be released from all further responsibility therefor.

Sec. 885. Repairing Mail Locks and Keys Forbidden.—No attempt shall be made to have a mail key or a mail lock repaired; nor to pry into the internal mechanism of any mail lock. No damaged or defective mail key shall be kept in post-offices, but each one, as soon as it becomes damaged or defective, must be promptly returned to the Department with an explanatory letter. With every application for a new mail key in lieu of one broken, the broken parts must be inclosed, and the number of the broken key stated.

All mail keys returned to the Department should be inclosed in a sealed letter or package addressed to the Second Assistant Postmaster-General (Mail Equipment Division), and be duly registered in every case.

No oil, grease, nor other foreign matter must be introduced into any mail locks, and under no circumstances will the breaking of a lock be excusable.

Sec. 886. Defective Keys to be Reported to the Department.—When a mail key is perceived to be much worn and becoming defective, timely notice should be given of the fact, always stating the number of the key, so

that a new one may be furnished before the old one becomes entirely useless; the latter to be returned to the Department. Whenever extra keys are furnished they should be kept in reserve for an emergency, and be locked up in a safe place in the post-office, accessible to the postmaster and his assistant only.

If a mail key be found astray, it must be returned to the Second Assistant Postmaster-General (Mail Equipment Division), in an explanatory letter duly registered, without attempting to ascertain the loser, or to advise him of its recovery.

Sec. 887. Brass Locks not to be Sent to Iron-Lock Post-offices.—In those post-offices where the use of the brass locks and keys is allowed for through mails, it will be deemed very reprehensible if sufficient care be not always taken to prevent such locks being used, instead of iron locks, on bags dispatched to post-offices where their use is not allowed, and where, of course, there is no key to open them. If, however, a bag secured with a brass lock be received at a post-office where there is no brass key allowed, the lock should not be broken or tampered with, nor the bag be mutilated; but it should either be returned unopened to the post-office whence it came, or be sent to some nearer post-office using the brass key, with the request to substitute an iron lock for the brass one. But in either case, the postmaster at whose post-office the irregularity occurred must be advised of it, and, if there be a repetition of it, be reported to the Second Assistant Postmaster-General (Mail Equipment Division).

Sec. 888. Proper Course when Defective Key will not Open Mail Lock.—If the only mail key in a post-office be broken or so defective as not to open all the locks, the bags should be passed, unopened, to the nearest post-office, with a request to the postmaster to take out the ordinary letters, &c., for the post-office where the lock could not be opened, and send them back by the mail carrier outside the bag, in a sealed package, until another key be received from the Department.

The registered matter for the office passed should not be so returned, but should be withheld until the first return mail, and then be sent back in a locked bag. A note stating the facts should be made upon the transit registry record of the postmaster who makes the return.

Sec. 889. Proper Course when Defective Lock cannot be Opened.—When a postmaster cannot open a lock securing a bag, because of a defect in the lock, and not of his key, he will then cut that staple of the bag to which the lock is attached, provided he has another bag and lock to substitute for them; but if he has no other bag and lock, he will pass the bag, unopened, to the next post-office, as in the case indicated in the preceding section; and he will make a note upon his transit registry

record stating that the bag was passed unopened to the next office, the reason why, and the date.

(See regulations relating to registered matter in transit.)

Sec. 890. Economy in the Use of Mail Locks.—The mail locks must be used with care and economy. Care must also be taken to equalize the exchange of locked pouches, and thereby secure to every post-office a return of the same number of locks sent from it. If at any post-office (not a depository) locks from unknown sources should accumulate in excess of its current wants, all such surplus locks must be forwarded with an explanatory letter to the Department.

Sec. 891. Unlawful Use of Mail Locks to be Reported to the Department.—It is the duty of postmasters and agents of the Department to reclaim and transmit to the office of the Second Assistant Postmaster-General (Division of Mail Equipment), all mail locks and keys found to be in improper hands, or applied to any other than their lawful use, and to see that the law (sections 1457, 1458) is enforced in every case of its violation known to them, by exerting due diligence always in collecting and reporting to the Department the facts and proofs to sustain a prosecution against the offender.

Sec. 892. How to Address Communications on Mail Equipments.—All communications and mail locks and keys required by this chapter to be sent to the Department must be addressed to the Second Assistant Postmaster-General (Mail Equipment Division). Such communications must invariably give the name of the post-office, county, and State from which they are sent, and must not embrace any other subject.

MAIL CATCHERS.

Sec. 893. How Provided and Kept in Repair.—Mail catchers, attached to postal cars for taking up mails without stopping the trains, are furnished on application to the office of the Second Assistant Postmaster-General (Mail Equipment Division). Such applications are to be made by division superintendents (through the General Superintendent) of Railway Mail Service, always explaining the reasons therefor; and if any mail catchers applied for are to be introduced or used for the first time on a railway post-office line, that fact should invariably be stated and the title of such railway post-office be specifically mentioned in the application.

The mail-bag cranes used on the railroads in connection with the mail catchers are constructed, erected, and should always be kept in good order, by the railroad companies, at their own expense.