

# US Postal Laws & Regulations

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Unclaimed mail



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Office direct to the sender, and valuable matter of the third and fourth class, in hand at the time of advertising, should be included in the advertisement, except registered matter, refused matter, fictitious matter, card and request matter, matter addressed to persons who call regularly at the post-office or which the postmaster has special reason to believe will be called for, matter indorsed "To be held until called for," "*Poste restante*," or similar directions, and matter which the addressee has requested to be retained. Such matter held on request should be marked, "Specially held for delivery."

**Sec. 590. Charge on Advertised Letters.**—All letters published as non-delivered shall be charged with one cent in addition to the regular postage, to be accounted for as part of the postal revenue. (R. S., §3935.)

**Sec. 591. Advertised Matter to be so Marked.**—Every letter or parcel advertised must have plainly written or stamped upon the address side the word "ADVERTISED," together with the date of advertising.

#### RETURN OF UNCLAIMED MATTER.

**Sec. 592. Request Matter.**—When the writer of any letter on which the postage is prepaid shall indorse upon the outside thereof his name and address, such letter shall not be advertised, but after remaining uncalled for at the office to which it is directed thirty days, or the time the writer may direct, shall be returned to him without additional charge for postage, and if not then delivered shall be treated as a dead letter. (R. S., § 3939.)

**Sec. 593. The Time for Return of Request Matter.**—The sender has the right by a subsequent written direction to the postmaster at the office of destination to lengthen or shorten the time originally named on the envelope, after which the letter, if not delivered, shall be returned to him, but it must remain for delivery at least three days; and postmasters must obey such written authority, and return as directed, without additional charge for postage. When the addressee has given general direction to hold his letters until called for, and they are not called for within the time limited in the return request, they should be returned to the sender in accordance with the request.

**Sec. 594. Card and Official Matter.**—Whenever any unclaimed matter of the first class bears the name and address of the sender, as post-office box, number and street, &c., without a request that the same be returned if not delivered, such matter is called "Card matter," and must not be advertised, but must be returned to sender at the expiration of thirty days from the date of its arrival at the post-office of destination. All such matter originating in Canada or Mexico will be treated as herein directed.

All official matter sent under penalty envelopes or labels, or the frank of Senators or Members of Congress, will be treated as card matter, and, if unclaimed, returned to the office of mailing, if known.

A request upon a drop letter for its return to the writer at some other post-office, if unclaimed, cannot be respected unless it has been prepaid with one full rate (two cents) of postage.

Unclaimed letters bearing the card of a hotel, a school, college, or other public institution, which has evidently been printed upon the envelopes to serve as a mere advertisement, should not be returned to the place designated in the cards, unless there is also a request therefor, indicating the writer to whom they should be returned.

A letter which has been opened inadvertently, or upon a wrong delivery, may be returned to the writer without additional charge, when it contains a card or return request. The postmaster must not open letters to ascertain the writer.

Unclaimed card and request letters, prepaid one full rate, but not wholly prepaid, are to be returned to mailing office for delivery to the writer, who will be required to pay the amount originally due. If payment be refused the matter will be indorsed REFUSED, and treated as such. (See section 602.)

**Sec. 595. Postal Cards.**—When the message upon an unclaimed postal card is wholly or partly written, and the name and address of the writer is disclosed, the same shall be returned to writer after thirty days from date of its receipt, with the words "RETURNED TO WRITER," stamped thereon, and his name and address written underneath across the face of the card. If the message be wholly printed, it will be treated as printed matter. (See section 593.)

**Sec. 596. Return of Other than First Class and Request Matter.**—All matter, other than first class, may be returned, but is subject to an additional charge for postage for returning the same. When the sender of matter which would be subject to return postage shall, by indorsement upon the wrapper or otherwise, request its return, postmasters should comply with such request within the time fixed by the sender—if no time is fixed, then at the end of thirty days—first charging such matter, however, with the necessary return postage, and indorse the same "RETURN POSTAGE DUE — CENTS;" and the postmaster at the office to which such matter is returned must affix thereto postage-due stamps sufficient to cover the return postage, and collect the same from the sender before delivering such returned matter. If the sender should refuse to pay return postage, the matter must be disposed of as "REFUSED." If the matter be unclaimed, it will be treated as other unclaimed matter. If postage stamps or money sufficient to pay the return

the three following, other than second-class matter, to be treated as waste paper, as directed in section five hundred and ninety-eight.

2. *Refused*.—That which for any reason the parties addressed decline to receive, other than second-class matter and printed matter, treated as waste paper, as directed in section six hundred and one.

3. *Fictitious*.—That which is addressed to fictitious or assumed names or to initials, or in any manner so that the person or persons for whom it is intended cannot be identified.

4. *Illegible*.—That which having reached the office of destination is so illegibly or imperfectly addressed that it cannot be ascertained for whom it was intended.

5. *Hotel*.—That which has been delivered at a hotel or public institution, or to a consul, agent, or other public officer, or individual who is in the habit of receiving mail for transient persons, and which has been returned to the post-office from such hotel, &c., as unclaimed.

6. *Obscene*.—That which has reached the office of delivery, but of which delivery is forbidden by section five hundred and eighty-one.

7. *Lottery*.—Circulars concerning lotteries, gift-concerts, or similar enterprises offering prizes, which are unmailable by section three hundred and seventy-nine.

**Sec. 603. Reason for Non-Delivery to be Shown on Matter.**—Upon every undelivered article of mail matter must appear the reason for non-delivery, such as UNKNOWN, REFUSED, REMOVED, FIRM DISSOLVED, DECEASED, IN DISPUTE, &c., as such indication is often of value to the writer. When no other reason can be ascertained, the matter will be indorsed UNCLAIMED, care being taken in indorsing or stamping not to deface or to obscure the original address or postmark.

**Sec. 604. Authority of Postmaster-General as to Dead Matter.**—The Postmaster-General may regulate the period during which undelivered letters shall remain in any post-office, and when they shall be returned to the Dead-Letter Office; and he may make regulations for their return from the Dead-Letter Office to the writers, when they cannot be delivered to the parties addressed. (R. S., § 3936.)

**MANNER, ETC., OF MAKING RETURN TO THE DEAD-LETTER OFFICE.**

**Sec. 605. Time of Return of Unclaimed Matter.**—Advertised matter will be held at fourth-class offices for one month and at all other offices for two weeks after date of advertisement, and then, if undelivered, will be sent to the Dead-Letter Office in regular periodical returns, to be made as follows, viz:

At fourth-class post-offices, once a month.

At other post-offices, once a week.

Sec. 306. Notice, when no Dead Matter to be Sent.—When it happens that there is no matter of any kind to be sent to the Dead-Letter Office at the proper time for making the return of such matter, a statement (Form 1523) properly headed and dated, and the words **NO MATTER TO SEND** noted thereon, should be sent to the Dead-Letter Office.

Sec. 307. Returns of Unclaimed Matter; how Made up and Transmitted.—In making up returns to be sent to the Dead-Letter Office the following directions will be observed, namely:

1. Every piece of mail-matter should be postmarked by stamp or hand with the name of the post-office and the date of sending to the Dead-Letter Office.

2. Each class of matter should be arranged separately and duly entered on the dead-letter bill (Form 1523) under its proper heading.

3. The bill and the copy of the advertised list must be sent with every return, not tied outside or inclosed in a separate envelope.

4. The advertised list so sent should give the name of the post-office, State, and date of advertising.

5. All matter delivered or otherwise disposed of since advertising should be indicated by a mark drawn through the name on the list.

6. A manuscript list of each piece of third-class matter of obvious value, and of all fourth-class matter, whether advertised or not, should be sent with such matter. For convenience this list may be made on a blank (Form 1522) for unmailable, changing the word **UNMAILABLE** to **UNCLAIMED**.

7. The whole return should be wrapped and securely tied in one parcel and plainly addressed, **DEAD-LETTER OFFICE, WASHINGTON, D. C.** It should also be indorsed, "**RETURN OF UNCLAIMED MATTER FROM**" (here add name of post-office). A penalty envelope may be used for the address label, but must be fastened securely to the parcel. If there be third or fourth class matter to accompany the return in too great quantity to tie the whole in one parcel, a pouch must be used so that all the matter will be received together.

8. Hotel and fictitious matter must be entered on a list (Form 1522½) and sent separately from other unclaimed matter.

9. Post-offices of the fourth class will use dead-letter bills (Form 1523) printed on white paper. Free-delivery offices will use the special form printed for them on blue paper and will register their returns. All other offices will use forms provided for them printed on yellow paper.

Sec. 308. Returns of Unmailable Matter; when Made.—Unmailable matter must not be held over to be advertised. Post-offices of the first class must make daily, and all other post-offices weekly, returns to the Dead-Letter Office of all unmailable matter deposited therein for mail-