

USPS Unveils New Mail Standard Proposals

Jan 17, By Larry Riggs

The U.S. Postal Service in a Federal Register notice Wednesday modified its original proposals for new mailing rules that will take effect with the next rate increase this spring.

While most industry groups declined comment on specific rule changes because of their complexity and newness, they did welcome the USPS's apparent speed in making these new proposals and its separate offers to meet with them to discuss these rule changes.

At the same time, the groups wished the USPS and Postal Regulatory Commission would give mailers more time than the usual 60 days to adjust to both the new rates and rules.

These new rules are slated to take effect in May along with an expected postage rate increase.

"We do appreciate that the Postal Service has released these proposals early enough for mailers to look at them and before the implementation date and that the USPS officials have decided to meet with mailers before the new rates go into effect," said Bob McLean, executive director of the Mailers Council.

"On first glance, it seems like the USPS may have listened to mailers on some of the proposals, but it's a 108-page document and there are probably things in there that even I don't understand," said Ed Gleiman, consultant to the Direct Marketing Association and former chairman of the Postal Rate Commission, now known as the Postal Regulatory Commission.

In its filing, the USPS unveiled a new set of mailing standards it said would encourage mail preparation that is compatible with its more automated processing capabilities. The USPS first proposed these rules last fall and drew ire from industry groups (Direct Newswire, Oct. 8, 2006).

At the time, mailers had until November to comment on the earlier proposals, which they did. The USPS will accept comments on its new proposals through Jan. 31.

According to the USPS, these new standards will be published in a new Federal Register notice next month. The Postal Service will accept comments on its latest proposals through Jan. 31.

"I hope that mailers have more time to implement these changes so printers can adjust and software companies can test new software," said Tony Conway, executive director of the Alliance of Nonprofit Mailers.

In brief, the USPS is proposing:

*A relaxed flexibility test for automated flats, which would be - administered by pressing one inch from the edge of the piece instead of one inch from the edge of the table. The USPS said this new test is more forgiving of flats with rigid inserts. Typical bound publications and catalogs do not need to be tested when they are not in a box and do not contain rigid inserts.

* A clarified definition of uniform thickness - allow a variation of up to one-quarter inch in thickness, not counting selvage.

* A relaxed deflection test which would allow pieces to droop to within one inch of length, up to a maximum of four inches, instead of four inches for pieces greater than 10 inches long and two inches for pieces less than 10 inches long.

* To waive the periodicals container charge for direct carrier route, five-digit carrier routes, and five-digit containers of mixed Outside-County and In-County pieces.

* Allowing periodical mailers to pay the new container charge by prorating it across multiple titles in a combined mailing if documentation is submitted through Mail.dat.

* Allowing mailers to apply the no-overflow tray option selectively at the three-digit and Automated Area Distribution Center (AADC) tray levels.

* Extending the "no bundling" standards to all automated carrier route letters, not just the letters we sorted in delivery point sequence.

The Postal Service said this updated notice will provide a comprehensive view of its final proposal at least a month before the its Board of Governors votes on the new postage rates.

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