

A Law Enforcement Guide to the U.S. Postal Inspection Service



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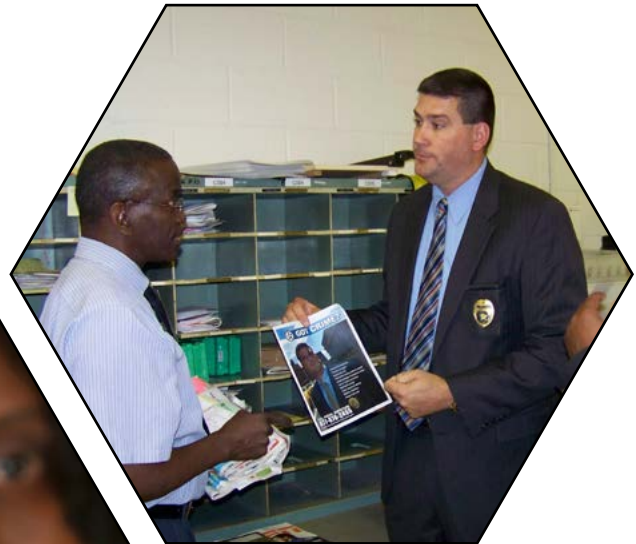
Contents

About This Publication	4
Who We Are	5
Jurisdiction and Laws	6
Mail Fraud	6
Mail Theft	8
Prohibited Mail Narcotics	9
Child Exploitation	11
Money Laundering	12
Mailbox Vandalism	13
How We Can Help	14
Resources to Assist Local Law Enforcement Agencies	14
Investigative and Enforcement Tools	15
Mail Covers	15
Search Warrants for U.S. Mail	16
Post Office Box and Change-of-Address Inquiries	17
Asset Forfeiture	18
We Can Help!	19
When is it Time to Call the Inspectors?	20
When Responding to Postal Crime	20
When Detecting Evidence of Postal Crime on the Street and During Searches	21
If Arresting An On-Duty Postal Service Employee	22
How Police Can Help Postal Inspectors	22
Conclusion	23

About This Publication

Postal Inspectors have a long history of cooperative work with other federal agents, police officers, sheriffs, and local and state law enforcement officers and prosecutors. This approach has resulted in greater protection for the public against criminal attack. We are committed to sharing with all law enforcement agencies our knowledge and experience, resources, and personnel within the limits of legal restrictions, staffing, and geographical distance.

This guide is intended to help other law enforcement agencies understand how we can assist with a wide range of investigations. It specifically provides information on postal crimes and when law enforcement officers should notify Postal Inspectors.



Who We Are

The U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS®) is one of our country's oldest federal law enforcement organizations. On August 7, 1775, Postmaster General Benjamin Franklin appointed William Goddard the first Surveyor General of Post Roads to regulate Post Offices and audit postal accounts. In 1801, these Surveyors were renamed Post Office Special Agents, then later Post-Office Inspectors in 1880, and finally Postal Inspectors in 1954. The name may have changed, but for almost 250 years the job has been the same: protect the nation's postal system from criminals who would attack or misuse it to defraud, endanger, or otherwise threaten the American public.

As the federal law enforcement, crime prevention, and security arm of the U.S. Postal Service®, our goal is to

promote confidence in the U.S. Mail®. We work to ensure that American businesses can safely dispatch funds, securities, and information through the U.S. Mail; that postal customers can entrust their correspondence to the mail; and that postal employees can work in a safe environment.

Postal Inspectors are federal law enforcement officers who carry firearms, make arrests, execute federal search warrants, and serve subpoenas. Inspectors work with U.S. Attorneys, local prosecutors, and other federal, state, and local law enforcement agents to investigate cases and prepare them for court. Inspectors throughout the country enforce roughly 200 federal laws related to crimes that adversely affect or entail fraudulent use of the U.S. Mail, the postal system, postal employees, and customers.

We also maintain a uniformed branch of Postal Police Officers assigned to major mail facilities nationwide. The officers provide perimeter security, escort high-value mail shipments, and perform other essential protective functions.

In an average year, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service:

- Arrests almost 6,000 criminal suspects, including about 2,500 arrests for mail theft or possession of stolen mail.
- Investigates over 500 mail fraud cases, resulting in almost 500 arrests and millions of dollars in restitution.
- Responds to more than 1,200 postal-related assaults and credible threats, resulting in over 150 arrests.

- Responds to thousands of incidents of suspicious items in the mail, including the screening of mail to detect improvised explosive devices and chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear substances.
- Investigates, on average, 100 robberies of postal employees and facilities, and about 100 burglaries of postal facilities.
- Responds to more than 80,000 consumer fraud complaints related to suspected crime via the mail.
- Arrests thousands of suspects for drug trafficking and money laundering via the mail or via postal money orders.
- Examines over 100,000 items of evidence and provides testimony in about 40 court appearances.

U.S. Postal Inspection Service: 1-877-876-2455

postalinspectors.uspis.gov

Jurisdiction and Laws

Postal Inspectors enforce more than 200 federal laws in investigations of crimes that may adversely affect or fraudulently use the U.S. Mail, the postal system, or Postal Service™ employees. The following pages describe some of our most important areas of jurisdiction.

Mail Fraud

Mail fraud is any scheme that uses the U.S. Mail to obtain money or something of value by offering a product, service, or investment that intentionally does not live up to its claims.

A mail fraud scheme in which the promoter intends to defraud the consumer can be prosecuted under the Mail Fraud Statute (18 USC 1341). Schemes prosecuted under this statute typically include: investment, mortgage, or insurance fraud; advance-fee scams; telemarketing fraud; illegal sweepstakes or foreign lotteries; free-prize and free-vacation schemes; charity scams; fraudulent business opportunities (such as work-at-home schemes); false-billing scams; and failure to provide merchandise or services ordered or paid for through the mail.

Postal Inspectors also fight fraud through civil administrative actions, causing mail to be withheld from delivery under certain circumstances. For example, under 39 USC 3003, mail may be withheld if a Postal Inspector obtains evidence the mail is addressed to a person using a fictitious name or address to conduct by mail any activity that violates the Mail Fraud, Lottery, or Fictitious Name and Address statutes. The party claiming the mail may also be required to furnish proof of identity and the right to receive the mail before delivery is resumed.

If no proof of identity is given within a specified time, the Postal Service issues an order returning the mail to the sender. These statutes are used, for example, when a suspect orders items through the mail using a fictitious name, or when a criminal opens a Post-Office Box™ to receive financial mail using a victim's personal information.

Postal Service customers who believe they are victims of mail fraud should report it online at the

Postal Inspection Service website at postalinspectors.uspis.gov or at our toll-free number, **877-876-2455**. Postal Service Form 8165, *Mail Fraud Complaint*, is also available at Post Offices™ and on our website. The following information must be provided:

- Full name and address of the seller or firm suspected of fraud.
- Copies of ads related to the order or transaction.

- Copies of correspondence, including envelopes.
- Method of payment, with a copy of the receipt, canceled check, or money order.
- Whether money was required before receipt of ordered merchandise, and dollar amount of the loss.



Mail Theft

Identity theft continues to be a wide-ranging problem. It's an insidious crime, and many victims have no idea their identity has been stolen until the damage has been done.

Identity theft occurs when someone unlawfully uses another person's name, date of birth, Social Security number, mother's maiden name, or other identification to gain unlawful access to their personal and financial information. Often, that

information comes from financial documents stolen from the mail.

Identity thieves can wreak financial havoc by making charges on a victim's credit cards. Crooks can divert funds from a victim's bank account to their own. They can intercept someone's check order to be mailed directly to them. The list goes on.

Because mail may be used to commit these crimes, the Postal Inspection Service has long worked with local, state, and federal agencies to investigate identity theft and prevent consumers from being victimized.



Prohibited Mail Narcotics

Postal Inspectors assigned to work Prohibited Mail Narcotics conduct criminal investigations related to narcotics trafficking in the U.S. mail system. If law enforcement receives information about illegal drugs in the mail, they should contact the Inspection Service. Inspectors collaborate with local, state, and federal law enforcement officers to further narcotics investigations.

Additionally, Inspectors can identify previously shipped parcels and monitor real-time delivery status. Inspectors can also help local law enforcement identify assets via an external “mail cover” request (see page 15). A federal search warrant duly issued under Rule 41 of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure must be executed to open U.S. Mail. The warrant is issued by a federal court and executed by a Postal Inspector. When a

state drug violation also violates federal law, Postal Inspectors may be able to assist in developing the probable cause necessary to obtain the federal search warrant.

If a mailpiece contains a sufficient quantity of illegal drugs, Inspectors may conduct multiple investigative techniques, such as controlled deliveries or surveillance, to help identify a recipient or drug trafficking network. Inspectors also work with their counterparts across the country to identify the person or persons responsible for mailing illegal drugs to a local suspect.

Inspectors proactively conduct interdictions of illegal narcotics originating from foreign or domestic sources that enter the U.S. mailstream for processing. Inspectors regularly work with narcotics-trained canines from local police departments while profiling for illegal drugs shipped using the U.S. Mail.

Federal Laws for Selected Postal and Postal-Related Crime

18 USC 111	Assault on a Postal Officer or Employee
18 USC 175	Prohibitions-Biological Weapons
18 USC 229	Prohibitions-Chemical Weapons
18 USC 287	False Claims Against the Government
18 USC 500	Money Orders
18 USC 501	Counterfeiting Stamps, Meter Stamps, or Postal Cards
18 USC 831	Prohibitions-Nuclear Weapons
18 USC 842	Unlicensed Explosives
18 USC 876	Mailing Threats and Extortion Letters
18 USC 912	Impersonating a Postal Employee
18 USC 930	Possession of Firearms or Weapons on Federal Property
18 USC 1001	False Statements to the Government
18 USC 1029	Fraud via Access Device
18 USC 1038	False Information and Hoaxes
18 USC 1302	Mailing Lottery Tickets and Related Items
18 USC 1341	Mail Fraud
18 USC 1342	Using Fictitious Name or Address in Mail Fraud Scheme
18 USC 1343	Fraud by Wire, Radio, or Television
18 USC 1461	Mailing Obscene or Crime-Inciting Matter
18 USC 1463	Mailing Indecent Matter on Wrappers or Envelopes
18 USC 1705	Destruction of (Vandalism to) Mailbox or Mail Therein
18 USC 1707	Theft of Postal Service Property
18 USC 1708	Theft of Mail or Possession of Stolen Mail
18 USC 1715	Nonmailable Firearms
18 USC 1716	Bombs and Other Injurious Articles as Nonmailable
18 USC 1720	Reuse of Canceled Stamps or Envelopes
18 USC 1725	Postage Unpaid on Mail put in Mailbox
18 USC 1735	Mailing Sexually Oriented Advertisements
18 USC 2114	Robbery of a Post Office or Postal Employee
18 USC 2115	Burglary of a Post Office
18 USC 2252	Mailing Child Pornography
18 USC 2332	Use of Weapons of Mass Destruction
21 USC 812	Schedules of Controlled Substances
21 USC 843b	Unlawful Mailing of a Controlled Substance
39 USC 3005	False Representation
39 USC 3010	Mailing of Unordered Merchandise

Dangerous Mail

Postal Inspectors who are trained as dangerous mail specialists conduct criminal and civil investigations involving the U.S. Mail, postal employees, customers, and postal assets to address events such as these:

- Mailed improvised explosive devices (IEDs) or materials (ammo, grenades, dynamite, etc.).
- Mailed hazardous materials or substances.

- Mailed hoaxes or hoax substances meant to represent weapons of mass destruction.
- Extortion and threatening communications.
- Nonmailable contraband and prohibited items.

Our objective is to prevent, respond to, and investigate chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosive (CBRNE) mail incidents—as well as threats and hoaxes—that involve or target postal employees, customers, or postal assets.

Postal Inspectors' response to these scenarios:

- Minimizes disruptions to postal operations by responding to incidents of suspicious substances or items.
- Safeguards the nation's mail system from CBRNE threats by screening and identifying hazardous substances and dangerous devices.
- Investigates criminal misuse of the mail to threaten, intimidate, or harass postal employees or customers.



Child Exploitation

It is illegal to traffic in child exploitation images through the U.S. Mail. This includes the visual depiction of sexual activities by children, defined by federal law as persons younger than 18 years of age.

Increased public concern over child exploitation resulted in the U.S. Congress enacting the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation Act of 1977. Sexually exploitative pictures of children are not constitutionally protected speech. Rather, such pictures are evidence of

the sexual abuse and exploitation of children. If sexual intercourse is depicted, the photographs are evidence of physical child abuse.

The Postal Inspection Service cooperates with other law enforcement agencies that combat the sexual exploitation of children and the production, distribution, and receipt of child pornography. We can provide assistance in a number of ways, including sharing intelligence gathered through a nationwide network.

If your agency has information on the distribution of child exploitation images or enticement of a child through the U.S. Mail, or if we can assist you in your investigations, contact the Postal Inspection Service at **877-876-2455**.



Money Laundering

The Postal Inspection Service investigates criminals who launder illicit proceeds and avoid federal reporting requirements in violation of the Money Laundering Control Act and the Bank Secrecy Act. Illegally obtained proceeds may include those gained through narcotics sales, the selling of counterfeit merchandise, mail fraud, tax evasion, embezzlement, and the smuggling of illegal aliens.

The Postal Inspection Service is one of several federal agencies with authority to investigate the laundering of illicit proceeds. Others include the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Drug Enforcement Agency, Internal Revenue Service, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

Money laundering is a process that disguises the origins of illegal proceeds, allowing criminals to evade detection, prosecution, seizure, and taxation. Proceeds are placed or entered into a financial system with funds deposited directly into bank accounts in small, inconspicuous amounts; or the funds may be converted to Postal Service money orders or other monetary instruments and then deposited into bank accounts. Money is moved to distance itself from its source. Criminals may electronically transfer deposited funds through domestic or international bank accounts. Illegal proceeds are then integrated back into the economy through the purchase of tangible assets.

Under 18 USC 5325, financial institutions are required to complete a Cash Transaction Record (CTR) and collect certain information from a person if they issue a bank check, money order, or cashier's check in an amount greater than \$10,000. The Postal Service is required to complete PS Form 8105-A, *Funds Transaction/Transfer Report*, with details of a transaction greater than \$3,000. Criminals often try to "structure" money order purchases to avoid reporting requirements. For non-banking financial institutions, such as the Postal Service, a purchase is considered structured if the buyer breaks currency totaling \$3,000 into smaller sums, even over a period of more than one day. The practice prevents the Postal Service from complying with federal reporting requirements.

Any property involved in a violation of 18 USC 1956, Laundering of Monetary Instruments, or 18 USC 1957, Engaging in Monetary Transactions in Property Derived from Specified Unlawful Activity, can be seized if it is subject to federal forfeiture laws. Under our forfeiture guidelines, seized assets may be equitably shared with any federal, state, or local law enforcement agency that participated in any of the acts that led to the seizure or forfeiture of the property.

Mailbox Vandalism

When a customer's mailbox is vandalized, the local police department is often the first, and sometimes the only, law enforcement agency to whom the event is reported. However, mailboxes are protected by federal law (18 USC 1705), and it is a crime to vandalize them (or to injure, deface, or destroy mail deposited in them). Therefore, any act of mailbox vandalism should be reported to Postal Inspectors.

We understand that local police departments may be involved in criminal investigations of a more urgent nature and are not able to assist in locating and apprehending mailbox vandals. Some perpetrators may never be identified in this type of crime.

Postal Inspectors do not have the manpower to investigate every report of mailbox vandalism or to conduct surveillances on every postal delivery route that has a vandalism problem. However, Inspectors will investigate mailbox vandalism when large numbers of boxes are damaged or destroyed and when there is evidence of tampering, rifling, or theft of mail from vandalized boxes.

Rural mailboxes are especially vulnerable to vandalism because they are usually isolated and frequently not visible to mailbox owners from their homes. Non-rural mailboxes are vandalized to a lesser degree, often by teenagers.

Mailbox owners can help prevent vandalism by obtaining Postal Service Label 33, *Warning: Penalty for Damage to Mailboxes and Theft of Mail*, from Postal Inspectors. The label can be affixed to a mailbox and warns of penalties for willful damage to mailboxes and theft of mail. In addition, Postal Inspectors advise customers who discover someone tampering with a mailbox to obtain a description of the person and vehicle, including license plate number, and to immediately report it to local police and Postal Inspectors.



Additional Areas of Jurisdiction

Assaults (18 USC 111 AND 1114)

Inspectors promptly investigate assaults and threats that occur while employees are performing official duties or as a result of their employment.

Burglary (18 USC 2115)

The Postal Service averages about 100 burglaries each year. Inspectors minimize losses through the use of security equipment and facility design.

Electronic Crimes (18 USC 1029, 1030, 1343, AND 2701)

Inspectors protect postal customers from fraud and other crime that may occur online and involve misuse of the mail or of the Postal Service.

Extortion (18 USC 876)

The Postal Inspection Service has jurisdiction when the U.S. Mail is used to injure a person's reputation or property, or as a threat to accuse a person of a crime, accompanied by a demand for money or other item of value.

Money Order Crimes (18 USC 500)

Postal Inspectors investigate the counterfeiting, altering, and forging of postal money orders.

Obscenity and Sexually Oriented Advertising (18 USC 1461, 1463, 1735 AND 39 USC 3010)

Inspectors follow court-established guidelines to uphold obscenity standards.

Robbery (18 USC 2114)

Postal Inspectors respond promptly to robberies of postal employees and contractors. Inspectors work to prevent robberies through security equipment and improved postal procedures.

Theft of Mail (18 USC 1708)

Inspectors invest significant resources into the investigation of mail theft by criminals and Postal Service contractors.

How We Can Help

Resources to Assist Local Law Enforcement Agencies

The Postal Inspection Service extends its full cooperation to all investigative and prosecutive authorities in law enforcement matters to ensure greater protection for the public. We have significant resources, including state-of-the-art technical equipment, to assist other law enforcement agencies.

We extend the use of our National Forensic Laboratory and related Technical Services Unit for joint investigations. Our laboratories, located throughout the country, can analyze evidence needed to identify and trace criminal suspects and provide expert testimony for postal cases brought to trial.

Crime laboratory capabilities include: handwriting and handprint comparisons; detection of counterfeit paper and documents; typewriting comparisons; detection of indented writing; and development and comparison of fingerprints, palm prints, and sole prints. Our Forensic Laboratory Services staff members provide chemical analysis, bomb identification, and analysis of suspected controlled substances.

Postal Inspectors can also assist local police departments in their public-education efforts through joint presentations on how to prevent certain mail-related crimes, as well as through our free publications on preventing mail fraud, mail theft, mailbox vandalism, and much more.

These publications are online and free to download at postalinspectors.uspis.gov/pressroom/pubs.aspx. For printed copies, contact a Postal Inspector at **877-876-2455** or at your local contact number.

Notice 71, *Bombs by Mail*, lists common characteristics of mail bombs and instructions for safely handling suspicious mail.

Notice 174, *Don't Be the Victim of a Check Scam!*, describes how fraudsters con citizens into depositing counterfeit postal money orders or checks into their accounts (in Spanish, Notice 174-S).

Notice 299, *Money Order Security Features*, illustrates genuine postal money orders (in Spanish, Notice 299-S).

Poster 84, *Suspicious Mail*, displays characteristics of suspicious mail and packages.

Publication 300-A, *Guide to Preventing Mail Fraud*, explains mail fraud schemes and offers prevention tips (in Spanish, Publication 300-S).

Publication 280, *Identity Theft*, explains how to reduce the likelihood of becoming a victim of identity theft.

Publication 308, *Know Your Rights: Victims and Witnesses of Crime*, addresses issues experienced by victims and witnesses, explains their rights under the law, and answers questions and concerns that may arise during a criminal investigation.

Publication 312, *Guide to Internet Safety for Children*, offers helpful tips for parents to keep their children safe online.

Label 33, *Warning: Penalty for Damage to Mailboxes and Theft of Mail*, is an adhesive-backed label that warns of criminal penalties for theft, tampering, or destruction of correspondence or mail receptacles, and serves as a deterrent to vandalism.

Investigative and Enforcement Tools

Mail Covers

The term “mail cover” refers to the covert monitoring and recording of information found on the outside container, envelope, or wrapper of mail, such as the name and address of the sender and the place and date of postmarking. It is illegal to obtain this kind of information from any piece of mail without an authorized mail cover, and to do so can jeopardize a case that goes to court.

Mail covers may only be authorized by the Postal Inspection Service, and only in criminal cases where information is needed to locate a fugitive or to obtain evidence of the commission or attempted commission of any crime punishable by imprisonment for a term of more than one year (a felony). The use of a mail cover is not an exploratory act and should not be requested if an investigation is not already underway.

Information from a mail cover often provides valuable investigative leads. To ensure the continuing effectiveness of the technique, do not refer to the use of a mail cover in any criminal or administrative action. Information from a mail cover is confidential and must be restricted to participants in the investigation.

Additional guidance on mail cover requests is in Publication 55, *Postal Service Procedures: Mail Cover Requests*, which is for law enforcement use only. Contact a Postal Inspection Service office to obtain a copy of Publication 55 and for further assistance with mail cover requests.

Search Warrants for U.S. Mail

Because so many search warrants for U.S. Mail are requested from various law enforcement agencies, regulations require that only search warrants authorized under the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure be honored, and only federal search warrants are authorized. Due to disparate state laws, state warrants would place a severe burden on the Postal Service system and the mailers who use it.

This restriction is contained in the U.S. Constitution, which grants exclusive authority over the U.S.

Mail to the federal government. Federal search warrant authority under the Constitution was first enacted into law by the U.S. Congress in the Espionage Act of 1917.

A Postal Service employee, authorized by the head of a Postal Service installation, may submit mail to a federal agent who is not a Postal Inspector only if that agent has a valid and duly issued federal search warrant. However, we request that Postal Service managers notify us before granting an agent direct access to the mail, so we can ensure the search warrant is a valid federal warrant.

State search warrants cannot be accepted under any circumstances. If you present such a warrant at a Postal Service facility, the manager in charge of the facility is not authorized to release any mail to you.

For further information, contact a Postal Inspector, who may be able to assist you in obtaining a federal search warrant if the violation of state law you are investigating is also a violation of federal law. While you are seeking our guidance or while we are applying for and obtaining a federal search warrant, the mail in question may be temporarily detained for a reasonable time.

When considering if you need access to “live” mail, you may find you do not need to keep the contents of mail in all cases. For tasks such as gathering evidence, identifying victims, and obtaining asset information, a mail cover may be more appropriate.

Post Office Box and Change-of-Address Inquiries

The Postal Service can assist a federal, state, or local law enforcement agency in its criminal investigations by making available certain information from postal records. The records may provide leads to suspects and witnesses.

The Postal Service may release individual, family, and business change-of-address information to law enforcement and government agencies upon receipt of a written certification of official need.

Information provided by a Post Office Box holder on PS Form 1093, *Application for Post Office Box or*

Caller Service, is not generally made available to the public; however, the Postal Service can release customer information from a PS Form 1093 to law enforcement or government agencies upon written certification of official need. When a customer has submitted a court order of protection, the Postal Service will not disclose the customer's name, address, or telephone number unless the requester obtains a court order.

Frequently, suspects sought by law enforcement officials or other agencies rent a private mailbox at a commercial mail receiving agency (CMRA) to disguise identities, locations, or business

names. CMRA regulations help deter criminals from using these "mail drops" to misrepresent themselves and gain access to other people's mail, a common source of identity theft. The regulations also make it more difficult for criminals to hide their identities behind private mailboxes and defraud consumers (often older citizens), businesses, and the federal government of hundreds of millions of dollars each year. Information provided by a CMRA customer on

PS Form 1583, *Application for Delivery of Mail Through Agent*, will be released only to law enforcement or government agencies pursuant to a subpoena or court order.



Asset Forfeiture

Forfeiture is a process by which the government seizes private property or proceeds that have been illegally acquired or used to facilitate a crime. The sanction is primarily designed to punish and deter criminal activity by taking the profit incentive out of crime and seizing ill-gotten gains, such as proceeds of illegal narcotic mailings. Forfeiture has proven to be highly effective in dismantling organized crime enterprises and in restoring losses to victims. Postal Inspectors use criminal and civil forfeiture statutes where it is warranted to seize assets associated with criminal acts.

The Postal Inspection Service has the authority to conduct administrative forfeitures when probable cause exists for violations of numerous federal statutes where it has investigative jurisdiction. These violations include money laundering, the mailing of illegal drugs and drug proceeds, and the mailing of obscene material or child exploitation images.

In addition to our administrative forfeiture authority, there are two types of judicial forfeiture available under federal law: civil forfeiture and criminal forfeiture. Civil forfeiture is a proceeding against property, and the property itself is a defendant.

Conviction of the defendant is not required, but the government must show by a preponderance of the evidence that the property was used or acquired in violation of a federal statute that includes a forfeiture provision. Property may be seized and held during the forfeiture process.

Criminal forfeiture is a proceeding against a person or organization, undertaken in a federal district court, where the government must prove beyond a reasonable doubt the defendant violated a federal statute. The charges include a provision authorizing the forfeiture of property used or acquired during the commission of

the crime. Upon conviction of the defendant, the forfeiture process can then go forward to completion.

Federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies that directly participate in a federal investigation may be entitled to an equitable share of forfeited property. The share granted to the participation agency depends on the extent to which the agency was involved in the investigation. The purpose of equitable sharing is to help offset the costs of law enforcement on the budgets of federal, state, and local agencies.

We Can Help!

Visit *postalinspectors.uspis.gov* or contact your local Postal Inspector at **1-877-876-2455** for more information on how we can help with the following:

- Investigating and locating suspects and witnesses by providing information from certain Postal Service records.
- Ordering a mail cover to locate a fugitive or to investigate felonies.
- Assisting in obtaining a federal search warrant for, and making a controlled delivery of, mail containing illegal narcotics.
- Responding to incidents involving suspicious items in the mail or at postal facilities, including improvised explosive devices, mailed biohazardous material, and other suspicious or dangerous goods transported via the mail.
- Assisting in child exploitation investigations where the mail has been used to send or receive sexually exploitative pictures of children.
- Assisting in obtaining an equitable share of illegally acquired property or proceeds in cases where the federal forfeiture law is applied to a postal crime.
- Providing forensic analysis of evidence for joint investigations.
- Providing your crime prevention unit with written material for consumer distribution on mail fraud, mail theft, mailbox vandalism, and other postal crime.



When is it Time to Call the Inspectors?

When Responding to Postal Crime

Thieves often target mail, as it may contain cash, checks that can be converted to cash or counterfeited, credit cards, and bank account information. A police officer in a vehicle or on foot patrol is often the first person to discover that a postal crime has been committed.

The table on the right lists some of the postal crimes you may respond to. (For additional postal

crimes, see the tables on pages 9 and 14). We request that you notify us of any of these matters. The commission of many, if not all, of these crimes violates state statutes as well as federal law. For more significant crimes, the U.S. Attorney's Office will prosecute offenders under federal law, which may carry stiffer penalties than state statutes.

Theft From Postal Clerks, Carriers, and Drivers

Robberies of postal employees delivering or transporting mail are often first reported to local police for quick response. Inspectors respond to and investigate all robberies and physical assaults of postal employees on duty.

Theft From Postal Delivery Vehicles

Thieves target postal vehicles because they may contain large quantities of mail. If a postal vehicle is broken into, employees are instructed to report it to local police and Postal Inspectors.

Theft of Mail From Postal Collection Boxes

Blue collection boxes and green relay boxes (used to temporarily store mail) are often targeted by criminals. They may contain large quantities of mail that thieves steal for checks and credit cards. Counterfeit or stolen keys may be used to gain entry.

Theft of Mail from Rural Mailboxes

A popular target of thieves, rural mailboxes are not always visible to homeowners and may be clustered by the side of the road. Thieves may steal outgoing mail left in mailboxes for pickup by carriers. The mail may contain checks with bank account and other personal information that may be used for check forgery or other crimes. Thieves often open mail and discard unwanted items.

Theft of Mail from Apartment Mailboxes

Many apartment complexes and new housing developments have centralized mail box units called Neighborhood Delivery and Collection Box Units (NDCBUs), sometimes also called Cluster Boxes. Residents who receive mail in an NDCBU will usually have access to only their own slot in the cluster of boxes. A person retrieving mail from multiple boxes could be a red flag indicating mail theft. Wherever mailboxes are grouped together, be suspicious of anyone going through more than one box.

When Detecting Evidence of Postal Crime on the Street and During Searches

When law enforcement officers conduct searches of individuals, residences, vehicles, or other property, they may find stolen mail or other evidence of a postal crime. While on the street and during searches, law enforcement officers should be alert for any of the violations listed in the table to the right and promptly notify Postal Inspectors if discovered.

Any of the listed items should be seized as evidence of postal crime if found during the execution of a search warrant. You may have sufficient probable cause to make an arrest. In all cases, notify Postal Inspectors immediately.

Possession of Stolen Mail

Possessing mail addressed to others, particularly if it contains checks or credit cards, is suspicious. The envelopes may have been destroyed, but the item is still considered stolen from the mail if it was taken before delivery to the rightful owner.

Fraudulent Credit Card Applications

Con artists may mail credit card applications in the names of victims or using fictitious names. Watch for applications in a number of different names.

Possession of Certain Postal Property Without Authorization

Be suspicious of anyone with a postal money order imprinting machine, blank postal money orders, postmarking equipment, or large quantities of postage stamps.

Possession of a Postage Meter that has Been Tampered with or Broken Into

A postage meter cannot be owned by an individual or business. It is leased from a meter manufacturer. Tampered meters may be used to obtain free postage and to defraud the Postal Service of revenue.

Large Quantities of Postage Stamps in a Single-Stamp Form

Thieves obtain thousands of canceled postage stamps, illegally wash the cancellations, and package the stamps for resale at a discount. Refer to a Postal Inspector any suspicious offer to sell stamps at a discount.

Possession of Postal Service Keys

Unauthorized possession of Postal Service keys for collection boxes, relay boxes, and other mail receptacles is a violation of federal law and could be an indicator of mail theft. Many, though not all, mail keys will be marked clearly with the words "U.S. Mail." Postal Inspectors should be notified if these are discovered.

Drug Overdose with Related Mailpiece

Overdoses can occur so suddenly that victims are sometimes found lying next to an opened parcel their drugs were shipped in. The presence of opened or suspicious mail at the scene of a drug overdose calls for contacting Postal Inspectors immediately, as we can use that information to track the drug's source and, potentially, intercept other deadly drug shipments before they are delivered.

If Arresting An On-Duty Postal Service Employee

Arresting an on-duty Postal Service employee sometimes requires certain arrangements in advance. If the employee is on duty in a Postal Service facility (which is federal property), contact the Postal Service manager in charge of the facility. Also contact a Postal Inspector if assistance is required to make the arrest.

When a police officer arrests an on-duty Postal Service employee for a nonpostal crime, the officer should immediately notify the local Postmaster or a Postal Inspector of the arrest and arrange for protection of the mail, mail keys, and any other postal property the carrier may have. Police officers may not legally delay or search mail carried by a Postal Service employee without a federal search warrant.

How Police Can Help Postal Inspectors

Contact the Postal Inspection Service promptly if you suspect or have evidence of these crimes:

A mailed bomb, explosive, or incendiary device, whether or not it explodes or ignites.

Bomb threats to postal facilities (real or hoax).

Assault of a postal employee.

Robbery of mail from a postal letter carrier.

Break-in of a postal vehicle to steal mail.

Break-in of a home or apartment mailbox, or other private mailbox, to steal mail.

Tampered mail or mail stolen from a postal (blue) collection box or green relay box.

A check stolen from the mail.

Use or possession of a credit card stolen from the mail.

Possession of stolen mail.

Possession of a firearm on postal property other than for official business.

Possession of a mail key or other postal property without authorization.

Counterfeiting a mail key.

Counterfeiting postage stamps, meter stamps, or postal cards.

Vandalizing or burglarizing a Post Office.

Possessing blank postal money orders or a postal money order imprinting machine.

Possessing maximum-value (currently \$1,000) postal money orders or receipts used in a money laundering scheme.

Vandalizing or destroying a mailbox, including placing an explosive or incendiary device, such as a pipe bomb, in a mailbox.

Conducting a mail fraud scheme.

Conducting a false representation scheme via the mail.

Mailing illegal narcotics.

Mailing child exploitation images.

Attempting to extort money or other items of value by mailing a threat to injure a person's reputation or property, or accuse a person of a crime.

Illegal break-in of a meter to obtain postage.

Conclusion

We hope this guide has been helpful. To learn more about the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, visit our website at postalinspectors.uspis.gov or contact your local Postal Inspector at 1-877-876-2455.

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