

Frequently Asked Questions: Postal Regulations

Q- What Postal Regulations affect developers and builders regarding their mailbox selection?

A- There are two documents, the Postal Operations Manual, and the USPS STD 7b. The STD 7b is directed towards manufacturers and the actual construction of the mailboxes, and the POM is related towards their application, which boxes can be used where, and that an approved mailbox must be selected. Imperial was actually invited by the Postal Service to help write the Std 7b.

Q- Tell us more about the POM.

A- Chapter 6 of the POM is very specific and intentional in its direction, and this is the chapter that deals with mail receptacles. You have City Deliver Routes, and you have Rural Delivery Routes; but don't let the names confuse you, they don't necessarily follow existing city limits. In fact, many emerging cities, even some populations of over 20,000 are all rural routes.

Within each route, you have various modes of delivers that are approved. There is curblines, service to the door, and central delivery. Business areas have a few other options, especially in a single building that has multiple businesses.

Q- Earlier, you said that only STD 7b approved mailboxes may be used for curbside delivery. What are the benefits of using an approved mailbox, and how can a developer know what's approved and what's not?

A- The most important benefit is that the customer ends up with a quality mailbox. There are a variety of rigorous tests that a mailbox must conform to, and manufacturers must use a quality assurance manual structured in accordance with ISO standards. Purchasing an unapproved mailbox may cost less on the front end, but customers are going to be just as happy about how long these will endure, as they would be if their roof would had to be replaced in 18 months.

The other issue relates to safety. Mailbox posts must be able to break away if struck by a vehicle. Obviously, this places a lot of mounting posts outside of the regulations, including brick and many of the iron and steel systems utilized. If a developer uses one of these systems, it actually puts liability on the future homeowner, themselves, and the builder, should someone get hurt. Same thing goes for any sharp edges, or features that might be hazardous to carriers or customers.

Approved manufacturers can be found in the Postal Operations Manual and the Postal Bulletin.

Q- A lot of builders have experienced problems regarding CBU's and twin mailbox systems. Can a local postmaster or growth management coordinator mandate which approved mode of delivery must be used?

A- Yes, and no. It's basically the role of the local postmaster, and those at the district and regional levels to ensure that the STD 7b and POM are adhered to. So, should a developer have this grand scheme of using something unapproved, then obviously, the postmaster could mandate which mode of delivery may be used, which of course would be one of the many approved options.

But concerning the options approved, the short answer is no. A developer cannot be required by the Postal Service to use CBU's any more than they can be required to use curblin boxes. The postmasters are there to assist the developer. Twin systems are also an option, not a requirement.

It's important to understand that each mode of delivery has its most advantageous use. CBU's, for example, are an excellent option for apartment complexes, and other places, where the developer can adequately provide enough space for parking, and to ensure that residents will not be required to travel more than one block, as the POM states.

Twin systems also have their role, for delivery routes where the mail carrier doesn't have to travel back down the same street. This is really the only application where they make sense.

Q- Explain the "50%" rule.

A- Ah, the infamous 50% rule! This is a well-known requirement that folks have been told about to ensure they use CBU's or twin systems. The only thing that wasn't explained is that this only relates to new subdivisions planned within an established city delivery route. It doesn't apply to rural routes at all.

Q- Can an existing mode of delivery be changed?

A- They sure can be. Customers can request that they be changed if the existing mode of delivery imposes a hardship on the customer. You simply make your request in writing to your local postmaster, and they review it and make a decision based on the customer's needs. They couldn't say no simply because it may cost more, for example. If the request is denied; however, it has to be forwarded to the district for review.

The post office can also request that an existing mode of delivery be converted to another, but this is a fairly complex process, as every individual owner must agree in writing. And if they want to retain their current mode, they have to be allowed to. Also, if a residence is sold, it can't be arbitrarily changed.

Q- Where can our members find more information on these issues?

A- All of this information is available online. We have all of it consolidated pretty well at www.imperialmailboxsystems.com, and you can also check out www.usps.gov. There, you'll find in the Postal Bulletin all of the approved manufacturers, as well as plenty of contact information.