

**MAILERS' TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE
WORKGROUP # 105-FINAL REPORT**

**EFFICIENT DISSEMINATION OF ADDRESSING RELATED INFORMATION IN
EMERGENCIES/DISASTERS**

February 14, 2007

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MTAC #105 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY THE WORKGROUP.

The MTAC #105 Workgroup identified 11 issues that can be summarized as three major categories (as listed here on the executive summary page). The detailed findings and industry recommendations can be reviewed in the section following the workgroup's recommended next steps. The purpose of this Executive Summary is to define the high level topics the workgroup recommends to the MTAC Sponsors.

Three Overall Themes/Issues:

Issue 1: Inconsistent communication disseminated from various sources within the USPS and mailing industry as to what has occurred and what should be done to avoid problems in the affected areas. There should be one location identified as a placeholder where the mailing industry can go to find relevant information concerning the event, and various ways to communicate that information should be considered. Currently the usps.com website is preferred vehicle, but it is not user friendly and needs enhancements.

Issue 2: Impacted mail recipients receive inconsistent or incomplete information on the impact of a mail embargo to their business or residence.

Issue 3: There should be a more efficient way to take advantage of the current technology available to implement a resolution process to return mail to affected areas as soon as possible. Enhancements to or a product developed with the functionality to replace the Mail Restoration Program is required.

Recommendations:

Issue 1: In the times of Emergency or Disaster, establish efficient communications to the mailing industry (Mail Owner, Service Provider, Vendor, and Logistics Provider). The BSN should be the owner of this information and responsible for it being properly communicated.

Issue 2: In the times of Emergency or Disaster, establish effective communications to the mailing customer. Location, Mail Class and anticipated duration of impacts should be considered as a standard format in the communications.

Issue 3: In the times of Emergency or Disaster, utilize technology to the extent possible in update and validation of address related information.

MTAC Workgroup 105- REPORT and FINDINGS

Issue Title: Efficient Dissemination of Addressing Related Information in Emergencies/Disasters

Issue Statement:

Providing timely address information throughout the mailing industry has become more critical as advanced automation equipment is deployed. There are a number of different situations involved. Some requirements are urgent and some routine, some very particular and some more general. Specifically, the recent natural disasters in the form of hurricanes Katrina and Rita serve as examples to show that the USPS methodology for expedited information dissemination that is already being used should be discussed with a view to ensuring that it covers all the bases.

The MTAC work group #97 on address quality recommended the area of information dissemination for further attention due to its high potential for benefits at relatively low cost.

It was proposed that the industry and the USPS work collaboratively to establish and maintain procedures whereby in the event of emergencies and/or disasters timely address related information can be distributed in the most efficient manner possible to all portions of the mail value chain. Specific areas of consideration for establishing this information dissemination system include data interchange, timeliness, content, storage, and format. Where possible, consideration should be given to existing industry data interchange formats.

Specific areas of consideration should include:

- What media is best suited for carrying emergency/disaster related address information
- (i.e. Internet, CD-Rom, printed labeling lists) for varying types of recipients
- Type of information to disseminate, and what types of data would not be disseminated
- Standards for conveying data changes (i.e. develop a product/process with the functionality described in the concept program once called Stop^{Link} is an example of one way to convey information in a standardized manner)
- What is the best method for conveying the changes (i.e. certified software vendors, publicly posting the data on RIBBS, distribution from NCSC)
- Frequency needed for updates, and how this may affect the technical means for carrying out the task

Expected Date of Completion: February 28, 2007

Issue Originator: Joe Lubenow

Workgroup Co-Chairs: Ed Wanta, Darron Holland, Steve Lopez, Jeff Stangle

USPS Sponsors: Charlie Bravo & Nick Barranca

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Background on the Workgroup:

Providing timely address information throughout the mailing industry has become more critical as advanced automation equipment is deployed. The recent natural disasters, in the form of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, serve as examples to show that the USPS methodology for expedited information dissemination already in place, needed to be reviewed with a focus on ensuring clarity and consistency throughout. With the storms impact on Alabama, Texas, Mississippi and the collapse of the levies in the southern Louisiana area and New Orleans specifically, the USPS rapidly developed emergency communications to the general public and mailing industry. Those methods included expansion of existing communications venues, such as usps.com, and developing others like the Mail Restoration Program used in the New Orleans mail embargoed areas. Much of the communication was developed to meet the needs of these specific events. Although innovative and effective, there are opportunities to improve and standardize the methods used for communicating any emergency situations which affect the flow of mail to the general public, mail owners, service providers, vendors and logistics partners to the USPS. Mailers Technical Advisory Committee (MTAC) established workgroup #105 to define this objective.

Workgroup Organization:

The workgroup consisted of four major groups of mail related firms: Mail owners, Service Providers, Software Providers and Logistic Providers. The workgroup met in person and over conference calls as a team and also split into the above four referenced sub groups to address the issues and make recommendations.

The common themes mentioned were to modify the website and provide a push email with updates on affected areas as well as improve or replace the existing Mail Restoration Program for restoring service to the embargoed areas. Mailers commented the Mail Restoration Program was unique in its data design (submission of 11-digit delivery point ZIP Codes was restrictive) and/or the mailers were postponing mailing to the areas until an easier, more user friendly option became available.

The work group identified eleven (11) issues with recommendations by consensus. These are documented in the issue and recommendations section below. Although we were fortunate that no major hurricanes occurred in 2006, the enactments of these recommendations are to benefit both the Postal Service and Industry in the event of such future disasters/emergencies.

Next steps:

1. It is recommended that the USPS take a close look at the individual recommendations and decide what issues can be resolved quickly and efficiently. The workgroup did not make specific recommendations on when the USPS should implement these suggestions; however, it would be highly recommended to implement some of the changes prior to the next Hurricane season.
2. The industry leaders also recommend that the BSN begin to address the current communication issues related to the Hurricane Katrina/Rita and other service related issues listed on the usps.com website in order to help finalize messaging prior to the next emergency (that could occur). By doing this, the USPS would be better prepared to act in a well defined and efficient manner as opposed to reacting to an emergency. Also, the changes that are recommended to better disclose instructions on usps.com can provide immediate benefit for the current issues that are left over from Hurricane Katrina/Rita.
3. This workgroup is recommended to be considered complete after delivery of this report and any MTAC update given at the February 2007 MTAC meetings.

The Workgroup's 11 Detailed Issues & Recommendations:

Issue #1 – There is a need for coordinated consistent information to mailers during a national emergency:

Recommendations:

- usps.com should continue to be the main vehicle for communicating information.
- The BSN should be the source that communicates emergency information to mailers, vendors, and mail recipients. Messages must be consistent and clear with what the USPS expects.
- Information needs to be provided to the Mail Acceptance Units in the same way to ensure the USPS and Customers are equally informed.

Issue #2 – Information needs to be streamlined and timely.

Recommendations:

- usps.com should continue to be the main vehicle for communicating information.
- Any information posted on usps.com should have the dates provided:
 - Origin Date
 - Last Update/Modification
- Timeliness of information on web is most critical for Logistics
 - Message needs to be targeted to specific audiences providing a single location for each mail classification.
 - Information needs to be in a location mailers and vendors can direct customers to use.
 - The current “Delivery & Retail” description does not provide detailed information for business decisions. Need to segregate, “Delivery”, “Retail” and “Drop Ship” information.
 - Create a “date modified” for each mail class so we know exactly what file was updated.

Issue #3 – If usps.com is to remain the primary source for information, changes need to be made to the website.

Recommendations:

- usps.com should continue to be the main vehicle for communicating information.
- Enhance the information posted on usps.com during emergency situations to include a subset of information. For example: say something to the effect of, “these particular classes of mail are restricted for delivery...”
- Control the dissemination of information based on the segregation of classes of mail.
- usps.com should have an option to have software search and download data, not requiring the user to look for it, eliminating user errors.
- Software and service providers agree that data concerning addresses in an effected area should be available for download from usps.com. We recognize that additional security measures may need to take place and recommend the secure hashing technology that is used in many Link products today.
 - Information on usps.com must be easily downloadable (daily delete file as an example). File names and formats should remain consistent over time.
- Any information posted on usps.com should have the dates provided:
 - Origin Date
 - Last Update/Modification
- Timeliness of information on usps.com is most critical for Logistics

- Message needs to be targeted to specific audiences providing a single location for each mail classification.
 - Information needs to be in a location mailers and vendors can direct customers to use.
 - The current “Delivery & Retail” description does not provide detailed information for business decisions. Need to segregate, “Delivery”, “Retail” and “Drop Ship” information.
 - Create a “date modified” for each mail class so we know exactly what file was updated.
- Website should support multi languages (Spanish).

Issue #4 – Information needs to be distributed via other media, beyond usps.com.

Recommendations:

- Mail Owners would like to receive an initial notification of stoppage of mail service in affected areas in as much of advance notice as possible so they will not send mail to those areas.
- Establish a “Push” email notification to the Logistics community so they are notified of the initial disaster/emergency condition as well as a notification prompting changes the Mail Service Updates website. Also, pushing all mail classes with the date modified whether or not the changes were made to each class is crucial.
- USPS could utilize the DMM Advisory email to send out an initial notification stating that the USPS has reacted to a particular situation and the information concerning the situation is ready to be disseminated.
- Because most people will not have internet access during such emergency/disaster situations, the USPS should have some other method of communication available to notify customers when partial delivery is reinstated for certain classes of mail.
 - Postcard
 - Phone Tree (Multi Lingual/Spanish)
- Establish an “USPS Emergency Hotline” where the Logistics community, BSN & BME personnel can call to resolve issues that may arise.

Issue #5 – Confusion and ambiguity needs to be eliminated.

Recommendations:

- usps.com should continue to be the main vehicle for communicating information.
- The BSN should be the source that communicates emergency information to mailers, vendors, and mail recipients.
- Narrative information is needed for information already posted on usps.com to include dates of origin & last update so they will have a better understanding of when the information was originally posted and last updated. Currently, there is some ambiguity and confusion as to what is current and what is not.
- usps.com should have an option to have software search and download data, not requiring the user to look for it, eliminating user errors.
- At the time the Emergency Condition is announced, there is an important need to have an Incident Policy Statement announced that details how mail in route to acceptance facilities is to be handled.

Issue #6 – There are additional data and technology requirements for software vendors and service providers.

Recommendations:

- The Mail Restoration program needs to be examined/checked for glitches because mailers are receiving conflicting information. They are getting good addresses sent back with an “N” code for Non-deliverable as addressed, when they believe the address is good because they have validated it with the customer. In order to get the addresses through, they have to circumvent the process, but they can only override the system once before getting an “N” the next time they run it.
- Provide reason codes for non-deliverables for the Mail Restoration Program or a Vendor/Service Provider replacement.
- It was suggested that the Mail Restoration program not be the only way to mail into an affected area. A Vendor/Service Provider product could be implemented as part of the restoration process after a disaster occurs to distribute update data.
 - Data can sit as its own file on usps.com or RIBBS for fulfillment purposes, to Mail Restoration licensees. This could be an option to replace DVD fulfillment.
 - File should be viewable by mailers without software, but useable within software programs. Other products can access it (NCOALink, DPV, etc.).
 - Timeliness of information on web is most critical for Logistics
 - Message needs to be targeted to specific audiences providing a single location for each mail classification.
 - File should be in a format that can be efficiently used across platforms. Information on usps.com must be easily downloadable (daily delete file as an example). File names and formats should remain consistent over time.
 - Create a “date modified” for each mail class so we know exactly what file was updated.
 - Mailers should incorporate the MTAC Group #97 Best Practices in the creation address database for Mail Restoration processes.

Issue #7 – Action taken in an emergency situation may differ from one class of mail to another.

Recommendations:

- Enhance the information posted on usps.com during emergency situations to include a subset of information. For example: say something to the effect of, “these particular classes of mail are restricted for delivery...”
- Control the dissemination of information based on the segregation of classes of mail.
 - The information could be integrated into a spreadsheet, for example, that would list every facility, by facility I.D., affected by the emergency/disaster.
 - The spreadsheet would identify status codes, separated by columns, for each class of mail to show which classes were affected/suspended.
 - It should also include two date columns...date reported & date updated. Whatever format used should be user friendly so that all can use it.

Issue #8 – Mailers and vendors need assistance in answering questions for their customers.

Recommendation:

- Establish a way for the USPS to communicate directly with the customer/individual recipient of the mail during emergencies because they don't always believe the information the mail owners tell them? For example...receiving a statement for a subscription to a magazine, but not receiving the magazine because delivery of that category of mail has been suspended.

Issue #9 – How should mail that has already been printed be handled?

Recommendation:

- Mail owners would like to receive information regarding particular points of entry so they can have some idea/scope of initial closings...whether it will be in 2 weeks, a month, or less than a month, etc. For example, if delivery of STD letter mail was affected, due to flooding, they could put an interim plan in place to resume delivery when the issue was resolved.

Issue #10 – How to communicate with mail recipients during an emergency situation?

Recommendations:

- usps.com should continue to be the main vehicle for communicating information.
- Establish a way for the USPS to communicate directly with the customer/individual recipient of the mail during emergencies because they don't always believe the information the mail owners tell them? For example...receiving a statement for a subscription to a magazine, but not receiving the magazine because delivery of that category of mail has been suspended.
- Letter to effected customers (mail recipients) that outlines options with automated responses that can be sent back to USPS for updating database
- Make the usps.com "mail service update" more noticeable on the webpage to locate easier.

Issue #11

Determination of Disaster or Emergency may have stringent guidelines that could restrict enactment of these recommendations.

Recommendation:

- The recommendations provided in this document and from the MTAC #105 Workgroup can be utilized in instances of significant mail disruption including floods, war, biohazards, pandemic, earthquakes, long term power grid losses, employee unions (strikes), etc. All of these mentioned (and not all encompassing) can impact a mailers ability to drop certain classes of mail into the USPS system.