



Packages move along on a conveyor belt at a USPS processing and distribution center. DANIEL COLE/ REUTERS

Sending a Time-Sensitive Letter? Postmark Dates Can Now Be Iffy

BY ESTHER FUNG

Sending time-sensitive documents like college applications, check payments, tax returns, insurance appeals and ballots through the mail?

You might want to drop off the letter a few days earlier or head to the post office and ask a mail clerk to manually postmark the letter if getting proof of the date is required for meeting a deadline. Otherwise, you risk missing an important deadline for sending your mail.

Since Dec. 24, a postmark no longer shows the date you deposited a piece of mail with the U.S. Postal Service. A letter dropped in a mailbox on Monday could be postmarked on Wednesday, if that was the day it got to a processing facility.

“While we are not changing our postmarking practices, we have made adjustments to our transportation operations that will result in some mailpieces not arriving at our originating processing facilities on the same day that they are mailed,” the Postal Service said.

The Postal Service said it made the change as part of long-running efforts to modernize and cut costs. Reducing postal-truck runs between processing facilities and local post offices is among the changes because it can cut costs and emissions.

That means mail from small post offices might be picked up the next day, rather than the same evening.

The change could have serious consequences for everyone from workers filing tax returns to students applying to college. Legal and administrative systems have for decades treated a postmark as evidence of when an individual met a deadline. Health insurers set deadlines for filing appeals.

The Postal Service, however, hasn't viewed the record-keeping use of postmarking as a service. It says customers use postmarking for their own purposes.

Because of the change, foundations and tax advisers last month began contacting their donors and clients to ensure their mailed gifts qualify for a 2025 income-tax deduction.

Some 14 states, as well as Guam, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Washington, D.C., will count a mailed ballot if it is received after Election Day but postmarked on or before (sometimes only before) Election Day, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

The Supreme Court will be hearing a case this year on whether to allow mail ballots that are cast by Election Day but received after Election Day to count.

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