

§ 268.1

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§ 268.1 General principles.

In order to conduct its business, the Postal Service has the need to collect various types of personally identifiable information about its customers, employees and other individuals. Information of this nature has been entrusted to the Postal Service, and employees handling it have a legal and ethical obligation to hold it in confidence and to actively protect it from uses other than those compatible with the purpose for which the information was collected. This obligation is legally imposed by the Privacy Act of 1974, which places specific requirements upon all Federal agencies, including the Postal Service, and their employees. In implementation of these requirements, the following rules of conduct apply:

(a) Except as specifically authorized in § 266.4(b)(2) of this chapter, no employee shall disclose, directly or indirectly, the contents of any record about another individual to any person or organization. Managers are to provide guidance in this regard to all employees who must handle such information.

(b) *No employee will maintain a secret system of records about individuals.* All records systems containing personally identifiable information about individuals must be reported to the Manager, Records Office.

(c) All employees shall adhere strictly to the procedures established by the U.S. Postal Service to ensure the confidentiality and integrity of information about individuals that is collected, maintained and used for official Postal Service business. Employees shall be held responsible for any violation of these procedures.

[45 FR 44273, July 1, 1980, as amended at 60 FR 57346, Nov. 15, 1995; 68 FR 56560, Oct. 1, 2003]

§ 268.2 Consequences of non-compliance.

(a) The Privacy Act authorizes any individual, whether or not an employee, to bring a civil action in U.S. District Court to obtain judicial review of the failure of the Postal Service to comply with the requirements of the Act or its implementing regulations. In certain instances of willful or intentional non-compliance, the plaintiff

may recover damages from the Postal Service in the minimum amount of \$1,000 together with costs of the action and attorney fees.

(b) The Act provides criminal sanctions for individuals, including employees, who violate certain of its provisions.

(1) Any officer or employee who, by virtue of his employment or position, has possession of, or access to, official records which contain individually identifiable information and who, knowing that disclosure of the specific material is prohibited by Postal Service regulations, willfully discloses the material to a person or agency not entitled to receive it, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and fined not more than \$5,000.

(2) Any officer or employee who willfully maintains a system of records without meeting the notice requirements set forth in Postal Service regulations shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and fined not more than \$5,000.

(3) Any person who knowingly and willfully requests or obtains any record concerning another individual from the Postal Service under false pretense shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and fined not more than \$5,000.

(c) In addition to the criminal sanctions, any employee violating any provisions of these rules of conduct is subject to disciplinary action which may result in dismissal from the Postal Service.

[40 FR 45726, Oct. 2, 1975]

PART 273—ADMINISTRATION OF PROGRAM FRAUD CIVIL REMEDIES ACT

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AUTHORITY: 31 U.S.C. Chapter 38; 39 U.S.C. 401.

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SOURCE: 52 FR 12901, Apr. 20, 1987, unless otherwise noted.

§ 273.1 Purpose.

This part establishes procedures for imposing civil penalties and assessments under the Program Fraud Civil Remedies Act of 1986 (codified at 31 U.S.C. 3801–3812) against any person who makes, submits, or presents, or causes to be made, submitted, or presented, a false fictitious, or fraudulent claim or written statement to the Postal Service. Procedures governing the hearing and appeal rights of any person alleged to be liable for such penalties and assessments are set forth in part 962 of this title.

§ 273.2 Definitions.

(a) *Claim* means any request, demand, or submission:

(1) Made to the Postal Service for property, services, or money (including money representing grants, loans, insurance, or benefits); or

(2) Made to a recipient of property, services, or money from the Postal Service or to a party to a contract with the Postal Service:

(i) For property or services if the United States:

(A) Provided such property or services;

(B) Provided any portion of the funds for the purchase of such property or services; or

(C) Will reimburse such recipient or party for the purchase of such property or services; or

(ii) For the payment of money (including money representing grants, loans, insurance or benefits) if the United States:

(A) Provided any portion of the money requested or demanded; or

(B) Will reimburse such recipient or party for any portion of the money paid on such request or demand; or

(3) Made to the Postal Service which has the effect of decreasing an obligation to pay or account for property, services, or money.

(b) *Complaint* refers to the administrative Complaint served by the Reviewing Official on a Respondent pursuant to § 273.8.

(c) *Investigating Official* refers to the Inspector General of the Postal Service

or any designee within the United States Office of the Inspector General who serves in a position for which the rate of basic pay is not less than the minimum rate of basic pay for grade GS–15 under the General Schedule.

(d) *Judicial Officer* refers to the Judicial Officer or Acting Judicial Officer of the United States Postal Service or for purposes other than specified in § 962.21 of this title any designee within the Judicial Officer Department.

(e) *Knows or has reason to know*, for purposes of establishing liability under 31 U.S.C. 3802, means that, with respect to a claim or statement, although no proof of specific intent to defraud is required, a person:

(1) Has actual knowledge that the claim or statement is false, fictitious, or fraudulent;

(2) Acts in deliberate ignorance of the truth or falsity of the claim or statement; or

(3) Acts in reckless disregard of the truth or falsity of the claim or statement.

(f) *Person* refers to any individual, partnership, corporation, association, or private organization.

(g) *Postmaster General* refers to the Postmaster General of the United States or his designee.

(h) *Presiding Officer* refers to an Administrative Law Judge designated by the Judicial Officer to conduct a hearing authorized by 31 U.S.C. 3803 in accordance with Part 962 of this title.

(i) *Respondent* refers to any person alleged to be liable for civil penalty or assessment under 31 U.S.C. 3802.

(j) *Reviewing Official* refers to the General Counsel of the Postal Service or any designee within the Law Department who serves in a position for which the rate of basic pay is not less than the minimum rate of basic pay for grade GS–16 under the General Schedule.

(k) *Statement* means any representation, certification, affirmation, document, record, or accounting or book-keeping entry made:

(1) With respect to a claim or to obtain the approval or payment of a claim (including relating to eligibility to make a claim); or

(2) With respect to (including relating to eligibility for)—

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(i) A contract with, or a bid or proposal for a contract with; or

(ii) A grant, loan, or benefit from, the Postal Service, or any State, political subdivision of a State, or other party, if the United States Government provides any portion of the money or property under such contract or for such grant, loan, or benefit, or if the Government will reimburse such State, political subdivision, or party for any portion of the money or property under such contract or for such grant, loan or benefit.

[52 FR 12901, Apr. 20, 1987, as amended at 56 FR 55825, Oct. 30, 1991; 67 FR 16024, Apr. 4, 2002; 72 FR 39012, July 17, 2007]

§ 273.3 Liability for false claims and statements.

Section 3802 of title 31, United States Code, provides for liability as follows:

(a) *Claims.* (1) Any person who makes, presents, or submits, or causes to be made, presented, or submitted, a claim that the person knows or has reason to know—

(i) Is false, fictitious, or fraudulent; or

(ii) Includes or is supported by any written statement asserting a material fact which is false, fictitious, or fraudulent; or

(iii) Includes or is supported by any written statement that—

(A) Omits a material fact;

(B) Is false, fictitious, or fraudulent as a result of such omission; and

(C) Is a statement in which the person making, presenting, or submitting such statement has a duty to include such material fact; or

(iv) Is for payment for the provision of property or services which the person has not provided as claimed. Shall be subject to, in addition to any other remedy that may be prescribed by law, a civil penalty of not more than \$5,500 for each such claim. As adjusted under Public Law 114–74, the penalty is \$14,308 per claim.

(2) Each voucher, invoice, claim form, or other individual request or demand for property, services, or money constitutes a separate claim.

(3) A claim shall be considered made, presented, or submitted to the Postal Service, recipient, or party when such claim is actually made to an agent, fis-

cal intermediary, or other entity, including any State or political subdivision thereof, acting for or on behalf of the Postal Service, recipient, or party.

(4) Each claim for property, services, or money is subject to the civil penalty referred to in paragraph (a)(1) of this section regardless of whether such property, service, or money is actually delivered or paid.

(5) If the Government has made payment on a claim, a person subject to the civil penalty referred to in paragraph (a)(1) of this section shall also be subject to an assessment of not more than twice the amount of such claim or twice the amount of that portion thereof that is determined to be in violation of paragraph (a)(1) of this section. This assessment shall be in lieu of damages sustained by the United States because of such claim.

(b) *Statements.* (1) Any person who makes, presents, or submits, or causes to be made, presented, or submitted, a written statement that—

(i) The person knows or has reason to know—

(A) Asserts a material fact which is false, fictitious, or fraudulent; or

(B) Is false, fictitious, or fraudulent because it omits a material fact that the person making, presenting or submitting such statement had a duty to include in such statement; and

(ii) Contains or is accompanied by an express certification or affirmation of the truthfulness and accuracy of the contents of the statement.

(iii) Shall be subject to, in addition to any other remedy that may be prescribed by law, a civil penalty of not more than \$5,500 for each such statement. As adjusted under Public Law 114–74, the penalty is \$14,308 for each such statement.

(2) Each written representation, certification, or affirmation constitutes a separate statement.

(3) A statement shall be considered made, presented, or submitted to the Postal Service when such statement is actually made to an agent, fiscal intermediary, or other entity, including any State or political subdivision thereof, acting for or on behalf of the Postal Service.

(c) In any case in which it is determined that more than one person is liable for making a claim or statement under this section, the civil penalty referred to in paragraph (a)(1) of this section may be imposed on each such person without regard to the amount of any penalties collected or demanded from others.

(d) In any case in which it is determined that more than one person is liable for making a claim under this section on which the Government has made payment, an assessment may be imposed against any such person or jointly and severally against any combination of such persons. The aggregate amount of the assessments collected with respect to such claim shall not exceed twice the portion of such claim determined to be in violation of paragraph (a)(1) of this section.

[52 FR 12901, Apr. 20, 1987, as amended at 56 FR 55825, Oct. 30, 1991; 61 FR 55750, Oct. 29, 1996; 87 FR 1676, Jan. 12, 2022; 88 FR 1515, Jan. 11, 2023; 89 FR 1461, Jan. 10, 2024; 90 FR 5651, Jan. 17, 2025]

§ 273.4 Non-exclusivity of penalty authority.

(a) A determination by the Reviewing Official that there is adequate evidence to believe that a person is liable under 31 U.S.C. 3802, or a final determination that a person is liable under such statute, may provide the Postal Service with grounds for commencing any administrative or contractual action against such person which is authorized by law and which is in addition to any action against such person under chapter 38 of title 31, United States Code.

(b) In the case of an administrative or contractual action to suspend or debar any person from eligibility to enter into contracts with the Postal Service, a determination referred to in paragraph (a) of this section shall not be considered as a conclusive determination of such person's responsibility pursuant to Postal Service procurement regulations.

§ 273.5 Investigations of alleged violations.

(a) Investigations of allegations of liability under 31 U.S.C. 3802 shall be

conducted by the Investigating Official.

(b)(1) For purposes of an investigation under this part, the Investigating Official may issue a subpoena requiring the production of all information, documents, reports, answers, records, accounts, papers, and data not otherwise reasonably available to the Postal Service. Any subpoena issued by the Investigating Official under this authority shall cite 31 U.S.C. 3804(a) as the authority under which it is issued, shall be signed by the Investigating Official, and shall command each person to whom it is directed to produce the specified documentary material at a prescribed time and place.

(2) In the case of contumacy or refusal to obey a subpoena issued pursuant to paragraph (b)(1) of this section, the district courts of the United States have jurisdiction to issue an appropriate order for the enforcement of such subpoena. Any failure to obey such order of the court may be punishable as contempt. In any case in which the Postal Service seeks the enforcement of a subpoena under this section, the Postal Service shall request the Attorney General to petition the district court for the district in which the person receiving the subpoena resides or conducts business to issue such an order.

(c) Upon completing an investigation under this part, the Investigating Official shall submit to the Reviewing Official a report containing the findings and conclusions of his investigation, including:

(1) A description of the claims or statements for which liability under 31 U.S.C. 3802 is alleged;

(2) A description of any evidence which supports allegations of liability under 31 U.S.C. 3802, or where applicable, a description of any evidence that tends to support a conclusion that such statute has not been violated;

(3) An estimate of the amount of money or the value of property or services allegedly requested or demanded in violation of 31 U.S.C. 3802;

(4) A statement of any exculpatory or mitigating circumstances which may relate to the claims or statements under investigation;

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(5) A statement of the amount of penalties and assessments that, considering the information described in paragraphs (c) (3) and (4) of this section, the Investigating Official recommends be demanded from the person alleged to be liable; and

(6) An estimate of the prospects of collecting the amount specified in paragraph (c)(5) of this section, and any reasons supporting such estimate.

(d) Nothing in these regulations modifies any responsibility of the Investigating Official to report violations of criminal law to the Attorney General

[52 FR 12901, Apr. 20, 1987, as amended at 56 FR 55825, Oct. 30, 1991]

§ 273.6 Evaluation by reviewing official.

(a) Based upon the investigatory report prepared by the Investigating Official, the Reviewing Official shall determine whether there is adequate evidence to believe that a person is liable under 31 U.S.C. 3802, and, if so, whether prosecution would likely result in the imposition and collection of civil penalties and applicable assessments.

(b) If the Reviewing Official determines that a case has merit and should be referred to the Judicial Officer for assignment to a Presiding Officer, he must first transmit to the Attorney General a written notice containing the following information:

(1) A statement setting forth the Reviewing Official's reasons for proposing to refer the case to a Presiding Officer;

(2) A description of the claims or statements for which liability under 31 U.S.C. 3802 is alleged;

(3) A statement specifying the evidence that supports the allegations of liability;

(4) An estimate of the amount of money or the value of property or services allegedly requested or demanded in violation of 31 U.S.C. 3802;

(5) A statement of any exculpatory or mitigating circumstances which may relate to the claims or statements under investigation;

(6) A statement of the amount of penalties and assessments that, considering the factors listed in paragraphs (b)(4) and (5) of this section, the Reviewing Official recommends be de-

manded from the person alleged to be liable; and

(7) A statement that, in the opinion of the Reviewing Official, there is a reasonable prospect of collecting the amount specified in paragraph (b)(6) of this section and the reasons supporting such statement.

(c) No allegations of liability under 31 U.S.C. 3802 with respect to any claim made, presented, or submitted by any person shall be referred to the Judicial Officer if the Reviewing Official determines that (1) an amount of money in excess of \$150,000; or (2) property or service with a value in excess of \$150,000 is requested or demanded in violation of section 3802 in such claim or in a group of related claims which are submitted at the time such claim is submitted.

§ 273.7 Concurrence of Attorney General.

(a) The Attorney General is required by 31 U.S.C. 3803(b) to respond to the Reviewing Official's written notice described in § 273.6 within 90 days. The Reviewing Official may refer allegations of liability to the Judicial Officer only if the Attorney General or his designee approves such action in a written statement which specifies:

(1) That the Attorney General or his designee approves the referral to the Judicial Officer of the allegations of liability set forth in the notice described in § 273.6; and

(2) That the initiation of a proceeding under the Program Fraud Civil Remedies Act is appropriate.

(b) If at any time after the Attorney General approves the referral of a case to the Judicial Officer, the Attorney General or his designee transmits to the Postmaster General a written finding that the continuation of any proceeding under the Program Fraud Civil Remedies Act with respect to a claim or statement may adversely affect any pending or potential criminal or civil action related to such claim or statement, such proceeding shall be immediately stayed and may be resumed only upon written authorization of the Attorney General.

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§ 273.8 Issuance of complaint.

(a) If the Attorney General or his designee approves the referral of allegations of liability to the Judicial Officer, the Reviewing Official shall serve on the Respondent, pursuant to paragraph (b) of this section, a Complaint, which:

(1) Specifies the allegations of liability against the Respondent, including the statutory basis for liability;

(2) Identifies the claims or statements that are the basis for the alleged liability, and the reasons why liability allegedly arises from such claims or statements;

(3) Specifies the amount of penalties or assessments the Postal Service seeks to impose;

(4) Informs the Respondent of his right to request an oral hearing before, or a decision on the record by, a Presiding Officer concerning the allegations of liability and the amount of proposed penalties or assessments;

(5) Informs the Respondent of how to request a hearing described in paragraph (a)(4) of this section;

(6) Includes a copy of the procedures which govern hearings under the Program Fraud Civil Remedies Act, and which are set forth in part 962 of this title; and

(7) Notifies the Respondent that his or her failure to request a hearing on the issues raised by the Complaint within 30 days of its receipt may result in the imposition of the proposed penalty and assessments pursuant to §§ 962.4(a) and 962.15(d) of this title.

(b) Service of a Complaint issued under paragraph (a) of this section must be effected by registered or certified mail, return-receipt requested, or by personal delivery. In the case of personal service, the person making service shall, if possible, secure from the person sought to be served, or his or her agent, a written acknowledgment of receipt, showing the date and time of such receipt. If the person upon whom service is made declines to acknowledge receipt, the person effecting service shall execute a statement, indicating the time, place and manner of

service, which shall constitute evidence of service.

[52 FR 12901, Apr. 20, 1987, as amended at 56 FR 55825, Oct. 30, 1991]

§ 273.9 Collection of civil penalties or assessments.

(a) Any penalty or assessment imposed under the Program Fraud Civil Remedies Act may be recovered in a civil action brought by the Attorney General. In any such action, no matter that was raised or that could have been raised in a hearing conducted under part 962 of this title or pursuant to judicial review under 31 U.S.C. 3805 may be raised as a defense and the determination of liability and the determination of amounts of penalties and assessments shall not be subject to review. A civil action to recover a penalty or assessment shall be commenced within three years after the date on which the determination of liability for such penalty or assessment becomes final.

(b) The amount of any penalty or assessment which has become final may be collected by administrative offset in accordance with 31 U.S.C. 3716, 3807.

(c) Any penalty or assessment imposed by the Postal Service under this part shall be deposited in the Postal Service Fund established by section 2003 of title 39.

§ 273.10 Reports.

(a) Not later than October 31 of each year, the Postmaster General shall prepare and transmit to the appropriate committees and subcommittees of the Congress an annual report summarizing actions taken under the Program Fraud Civil Remedies Act during the most recent 12-month period ending the previous September 30.

(b) The report referred to in paragraph (a) of this section shall include the following information for the period covered by the report:

(1) A summary of matters referred by the Investigating Official to the Reviewing Official under this part;

(2) A summary of matters transmitted to the Attorney General under this part;

(3) A summary of all hearings conducted by a Presiding Officer under

part 962 of this title, and the results of such hearings; and

(4) A summary of the actions taken during the reporting period to collect any civil penalty or assessment imposed under the Program Fraud Civil Remedies Act.

Damage to or Destruction of Firm Mailings

PART 281—FIRM MAILINGS DAMAGED OR DESTROYED THROUGH TRANSPORTATION ACCIDENTS OR CATASTROPHES

Sec.

281.1 Notification of firm mailers.

281.2 Action required by processing postal officials.

281.3 Postal inspector responsibilities.

281.4 Disclaimer.

AUTHORITY: 39 U.S.C. 401, 403, and 404.

§ 281.1 Notification of firm mailers.

Whenever bulk firm mail shipments are involved in transportation accidents or catastrophes, such as train or highway accidents, fire, flood, etc., it will be the responsibility of the sectional center director of customer services at the office of mailing to give known mailers timely notification of the incident and its effect on their mail shipment(s).

[39 FR 20974, June 17, 1974, as amended at 40 FR 2179, Jan. 10, 1975]

§ 281.2 Action required by processing postal officials.

Postal officials processing salvable mail recovered from the scene of an ac-

cident or catastrophe are responsible for giving timely notification of the incident to the sectional center director of customer services at the office of mailing. The notification should include, but not be limited to:

(a) The determinable names of the major mailers involved;

(b) The nature and extent of damage or destruction;

(c) Anticipated delivery delay; and

(d) If known, the shipment delivery destination(s).

[39 FR 20974, June 17, 1974, as amended at 40 FR 2179, Jan. 10, 1975]

§ 281.3 Postal inspector responsibilities.

The postal inspector investigating the incident should assure that the processing postal officials are fulfilling their notification responsibilities on a timely basis. Should the situation arise where no postal officials are involved in processing affected mail, then the investigating postal inspector will take necessary action to insure that appropriate notification is made.

[39 FR 20974, June 17, 1974]

§ 281.4 Disclaimer.

The Postal Service will not be liable in damages for any loss occasioned by any failure to notify firm mailers in accordance with this part of damage to or destruction of firm mailings.

[39 FR 20974, June 17, 1974]