

Alert! Official Changes to Postmark Processing

In November 2025, the federal government formally and quietly finalized changes to postmark procedures, which went into effect on December 24, 2025 and impacts individuals that use the United States Postal Service (USPS) to mail time-sensitive items.

Specifically, a postmark is now **officially** defined as a marking, applied by the USPS to a mailpiece, which displays the location of the processing facility or retail unit that applied the marking and (if applied at a processing facility) the date of the first automated processing operation performed on that mailpiece, or (if applied at a post office) the date on which the mailpiece was accepted at that post office.

Importantly, *the date that the postal service first takes possession of the mail piece may not align with the date on the postmark*; i.e., the postmark may bear a later date from the date of first possession due to a shift towards Regional Transportation Optimization (RTO). RTO was identified as part of the Collecting For America plan adopted by the postal service, with the stated goal of “modernizing USPS’s transportation network to account for a decline in mail volume. The Postal Regulatory Commission issued an advisory opinion against RTO, stating that it would negatively impact service, particularly in rural areas. Specifically, these new changes set forth that mail dropped more than 50 miles from a regional hub is collected the next day as opposed to the same day.

Towns are impacted by these changes, as many taxpayers opt to pay their taxes by mail and rely on postmarks for timely payments. However, it is important to note that the only way to guarantee a date on a postmark is to have the mailpiece hand cancelled at the counter by the postal service. **This has always been the case.** This rule does **not** change when mail is postmarked, is the mailpiece has been and will continue to be postmarked upon processing by the USPS, which is not necessarily the day the mailpiece is dropped off. Taxpayers still have the ability to get a postmark on the same day it is mailed by them by requesting the hand cancelling at the counter. This new rule confirms what has been happening in practice over the last few years: a mailpiece deposited in a mailbox may not, in fact, be postmarked that same day. This will now hold true for rural towns and towns not located within 50 miles of a regional hub.

To ensure timely payment and avoid penalties that the town cannot legally waive, taxpayers should either pay online, pay in person, or request hand-cancellation at a USPS retail counter when mailing payments near deadlines. Towns should prominently post this information on their websites and on their signboards to alert residents that mailbox deposits may result in delayed postmarks that could trigger late payment penalties.