Mail Management

Instructor Lesson Plan

Time Required: 1 Hour

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| Lesson Description |
| The information below provides the instructor with an overview of the lesson and the materials that are required to effectively present this instruction. |
| TMS # | 1279424 |
| Prerequisites | There are no prerequisites for this lesson. |
| target audience | The target audience for this lesson is those assigned to the Intake Processing Center (IPC). Although this lesson is targeted to teach those assigned to the IPC, it may be taught to other VA personnel as mandatory or refresher type training. |
| Time Required | 1 hour |
| Materials/TRAINING AIDS | Lesson materials:* Mail Management PowerPoint Presentation
* Mail Management Trainee Handouts
 |
| Training Area/Tools  | The following are required to ensure the trainees are able to meet the lesson objectives: * Classroom or private area suitable for participatory discussions
* Seating, writing materials, and writing surfaces for trainee note taking and participation
* Handouts, which include a practical exercise
* Large writing surface (easel pad, chalkboard, dry erase board, overhead projector, etc.) with appropriate writing materials
* Computer with PowerPoint software to present the lesson material

Trainees require access to the following tools: * VA TMS to complete the assessment
* Access to the VBA intranet
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| Pre-Planning  | * Become familiar with all training materials by reading the Instructor Lesson Plan while simultaneously reviewing the corresponding PowerPoint slides. This will provide you the opportunity to see the connection between the Lesson Plan and the slides, which will allow for a more structured presentation during the training session.
* Become familiar with the content of the trainee handouts and their association to the Lesson Plan.
* Practice is the best guarantee of providing a quality presentation. At a minimum, do a complete walkthrough of the presentation to practice coordination between this Lesson Plan, the trainee handouts, and the PowerPoint slides and ensure your timing is on track with the length of the lesson.
* Ensure that there are copies of all handouts before the training session.
* When required, reserve the training room.
* Arrange for equipment such as flip charts, an overhead projector, and any other equipment (as needed).
* Talk to people in your office who are most familiar with this topic to collect experiences that you can include as examples in the lesson.
* This lesson plan belongs to you. Feel free to highlight headings, key phrases, or other information to help the instruction flow smoothly. Feel free to add any notes or information that you need in the margins.
 |
| Training Day  | * Arrive as early as possible to ensure access to the facility and computers.
* Become familiar with the location of restrooms and other facilities that the trainees will require.
* Test the computer and projector to ensure they are working properly.
* Before class begins, open the PowerPoint presentation to the first slide. This will help to ensure the presentation is functioning properly.
* Make sure that a whiteboard or flip chart and the associated markers are available.
* The instructor completes a roll call attendance sheet or provides a sign-in sheet to the students. The attendance records are forwarded to the Regional Office Training Managers.
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| Introduction to Mail Management |
| INSTRUCTOR INTRODUCTION | Complete the following:* Introduce yourself
* Orient learners to the facilities
* Ensure that all learners have the required handouts
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| time required | 5 minutes |
| Purpose of LessoN | The purpose of this lesson is to teach students the proper procedure for screening mail. Students will also learn date stamping procedures.  |
| Lesson ObjectivesSlide 2 Handout 2 | In order to accomplish the purpose of this lesson, the trainee will be required to accomplish the following lesson objectives.Thetraineewill be able to: * Understand the procedures for mail management
* Identify correct date stamping techniques
 |
| Explain the following: | Each learning objective is covered in the associated topic. At the conclusion of the lesson, the learning objectives will be reviewed.  |
| Motivation | Inform trainees of the enormous impact that proper mail management has on the timeliness of Veteran’s claims. Stress to trainees that date stamping is for the protection of the Veteran and the Agency. |
| STAR Error code(s) | The Systematic Technical Accuracy Review (STAR) Program reviews cases and considers them either “accurate” or “in error” for the purpose of measuring technical accuracy. Currently there are no STAR code errors for mail management or date stamps that this lesson will prevent. However, this does not make this lesson inconsequential or unimportant. |
| ReferencesSlide 3Handout 2 | Explain where these references are located in the workplace.* [M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, Chapter 1. B, Mail Management](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014111/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-1-Section-B-Mail-Management)
* [M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, Chapter 1, C, Recording the Date of Receipt of Incoming Documents](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014112/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-1-Section-C-Initial-Screening-Policies)
* [M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, Chapter 1, D, General Information About Claims That Require Priority Processing](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000020037/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-1-Section-D-Claims-That-Require-Priority-Processin)

All M21-1 references are found in the [CPKM](https://vaww.compensation.pension.km.va.gov/). |

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| Topic 1: Mail Management |
| Introduction | This topic will teach trainees the proper procedure for screening mail.  |
| Time Required | 25 minutes |
| OBJECTIVES/Teaching Points | Topic objectives:* Understand the procedures for mail management

The following topic teaching points support the topic objectives: * Classifying mail
* Incoming mail
* Handling priority and action mail
* Handling file mail
* Handling unidentified mail
* Handling in-process mail
* Miscellaneous mail
* Procedures for handling miscellaneous mail
* Outgoing mail
* Procedures for handling outgoing mail
* Determining Which RO or PMC Has Jurisdiction Over Mail From Residents of a Foreign Country
 |
| Classifying MailSlides 4-7Handout 3 | The table below describes the four classes of mail Veterans Service Centers (VSCs) and Pension Management Centers (PMCs) routinely handle.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Mail Class** | **Description** |
| Incoming | Mail pertaining to claims for benefits that originates from outside the VSC/PMC. It includes the following four subclasses:* priority mail
* action mail
* file mail, and
* unidentified mail.
 |
| In-Process | Mail pertaining to an issue the VSC/PMC is already controlling/tracking through applications that include* Share
* the Veterans Appeals Control and Locator System (VACOLS)
* Modern Awards Processing – Development (MAP-D), and
* the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS).
* All evidence received that does not correspond to a pending tracked item must be accurately recorded with the proper receipt date using the MANAGE EVIDENCE screen in VBMS, or the EVIDENCE tab in MAP-D.
 |
| Miscellaneous | Mail that neither constitutes an original claim for benefits (thereby requiring the creation of a claims folder) nor can be associated with an existing claims folder. It includes the following three subclasses:* military file
* unidentifiable mail, and
* undeliverable mail.
 |
| Outgoing | Mail the VSC/PMC releases to entities outside the VSC/PMC. It includes the following three subclasses:* express mail
* interoffice mail, and
* regular/routine outgoing mail.
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| Incoming MailSlides 8-10Handout 4 | The table below describes the four subclasses of incoming mail.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Subclass** | **Description** |
| Priority | * Any claimant who is
	+ diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) or Lou Gehrig’s Disease
	+ a participant in the Fully Developed Claim (FDC) Program
	+ experiencing extreme financial hardship, or
	+ a former Prisoner of War (FPOW).
* Any current or former member of the Armed Forces who
	+ was very seriously injured/seriously injured (VSI/SI) in service and is *not* already receiving VA disability benefits
	+ is a FPOW
	+ is homeless
	+ is terminally ill
	+ is more than 85 years old, or
	+ received the Medal of Honor.

***Important:*** priority mail is expedited ahead of claims that are not priority due to the time sensitive nature of a priority claim. |
| Action | All forms and letters requiring action or response by VA that the VSC/PMC* receives from outside sources, and
* does not consider priority mail.
 |
| File | Mail that requires no action or response by VA. This includes copies of system-generated letters that the Hines and Philadelphia information technology centers (ITCs) send to regional offices (ROs) for record-keeping purposes only. |
| Unidentified | Mail that does not reference a Veteran or cannot be associated with a Veteran because the mail does not contain sufficient information about the Veteran to allow for accurate identification. |

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| Handling Priority and Action MailSlide 11Handout 4 | VSCs/PMCs screen and process mail packages uploaded to the Centralized Mail (CM) portal.  ***Note***:  Compensation and Pension mail received at ROs is shipped directly to the scanning vendors without prescreening.     |
| Handling File MailSlide 11-12Handout 5 | Upload all file mail to an electronic claims folder (eFolder). |
| Handling Unsolicited Evidence*Slide 13-14**Handout 5* | All evidence received that does not correspond to a pending tracked item must be accurately recorded with the proper receipt date using the MANAGE EVIDENCE screen in VBMS, or the EVIDENCE tab in MAP-D.The Manage Evidence screen can be located under the Veteran Profile then select “Manage Evidence” from the drop down menu.1. Click on the “Add Unsolicited” tab then fill out the date the documents were received and the document type. i.e. 21-4138, correspondence, etc.. Start
2. Click “Add Evidence”
3. Repeat for all evidence that you want to add.
4. IMPORTANT \*\* Once all evidence is added you must click on **Complete**. This is important as the evidence is not added to VBMS until the Complete button is selected.
 |
| Handling Unidentified Mail*Slide 15**Handout 6* | If a return address exists for mail that does not reference a Veteran or cannot be associated with a Veteran because the mail does not contain sufficient information to allow for accurate identification* download and print the mail from the CM portal
* return the mail to the sender, and
* ask the sender to
	+ identify the Veteran to whom the mail refers, and/or
	+ provide sufficient information (claim number, Social Security number (SSN), branch of service, dates of service, etc.) to allow VA to identify the Veteran within its systems of record.

If *no return address exists*, follow the instructions in [M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, Chapter 4, Section H](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014133/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-4-Section-H-File-Types) for handling *unidentifiable* mail. |
| Miscellaneous Mail*Slide 16**Handout 7* | The table below describes the categories of miscellaneous mail.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Mail Category | Description |
| Military File | For a description of the contents of the * military file, see [M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, Chapter 4, Section H](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014133/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-4-Section-H-File-Types), or
* temporary military file, see [M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, Chapter 4, Section H](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014133/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-4-Section-H-File-Types).
 |
| Unidentifiable | Mail with no return address or identifiable information needed to create a* corporate record, or
* claims folder.
 |
| Undeliverable | Correspondence VA sent to a claimant, beneficiary, or third party that the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) subsequently returned due to an insufficient or invalid address, expired forwarding order, or inability to identify the addressee. |

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| Procedures for Handling Miscellaneous Mail*Slide 17**Handout 7* | The table below contains procedures for handling miscellaneous mail.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Mail Category | Procedure |
| Military File | * Organize the material in alphabetical order by calendar year, and
* maintain it in the military file.
 |
| Unidentifiable | * Download and print from the CM portal, and
* File the mail in the unidentifiable mail files.
 |
| Undeliverable | Follow the instructions in [M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, Chapter 1, Section B](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014111/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-1-Section-B-Mail-Management#6) when the USPS returns mail as undeliverable. |

 |
| Outgoing Mail*Slide 18**Handout 7* | The table below describes the three categories of outgoing mail.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Mail Category | Description |
| Express | Mail the addressee must receive by the most expedient means. |
| Interoffice | Mail that requires delivery to other operating elements in the RO |
| Regular/routine | * Letters and forms an RO sends to a person or place outside the RO that do not require expedited delivery.
* Interoffice mail for VA medical facilities, other ROs, or VA Central Office (VACO).
 |

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| Procedures for Handling Outgoing Mail*Slide 19**Handout 8* | The table below contains procedures for handling outgoing mail.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Mail Category | Procedure |
| Express | * Hand deliver the mail to the RO’s mailroom
* complete an air bill from the express mail contract carrier
* document the tracking number for the mail and keep it until the intended recipient has received the mail, and
* follow any other procedures for sending express mail that the operating element responsible for mailroom services has established.
 |
| Interoffice | Clearly identify the intended recipient to include the appropriate mail routing symbol. |
| Regular/routine | * For mail related to other off site business lines not in CM portal (Fiduciary, VR&E, Cemetery, VHA, etc.), bundle and forward mail through USPS.
* Send other outgoing regular/routine (such as development or award letters) through USPS.

*Note*: Other RO or PMC claim related mail is no longer forwarded through USPS to the other ROs/PMCs. Upload the mail to the CM portal. |

 |
| Determining Which RO or PMC Has Jurisdiction Over Mail From Residents of a Foreign Country*Slide 20**Handout 8* | See the table below when determining jurisdiction for mail received from residents of a foreign country.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| If the mail received is for… | And the claimant resides in… | Then refer mail to the… |
| Disability compensation, pension, survivor benefits, or related appeals | The Philippines | Manila RO |
| Disability compensation or related appeal(s), work items, or non-rating issues | A foreign country other than the Philippines | Pittsburgh RO |
| Pension or survivor claims or related appeal(s) | * Mexico
* Central and South America, or
* the Caribbean
 | St .Paul Pension Management Center (PMC) |
| Pension or survivor claims or related appeal(s) | a foreign country other than* the Philippines
* Mexico
* Central and South America, or
* the Caribbean
 | Philadelphia PMC |

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| Topic 2: Date Stamp |
| Introduction | This topic will teach the trainee the procedures for date stamping evidence. |
| Time Required | 15 minutes |
| OBJECTIVES/Teaching Points | Topic objectives:* Identify correct date stamping techniques

The following topic teaching points support the topic objectives: * Requirements to stamp the date of receipt on all incoming documents
* Handling documents processed without a date stamp
* Placement of the date stamp on incoming documents
* Date of receipt for mail processed in the CM portal
* Original documents
 |
| Requirement to Stamp the Date of Receipt on All Incoming DocumentsSlide 21Handout 9 | Each document submitted to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) ***must*** receive a stamp with the date of receipt. The table below outlines requirements regarding the type of date stamps used by facilities and locations where VA has a presence.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **At a(n)…** | **Use a(n)…** |
| regional office (RO) | electronic date stamp containing black ink. |
| Out-based facility with five or more employees | electronic or manual date stamp containing red ink. |
| Out-based facility with fewer than five employees and sites conducting* Transition Assistance and Disabled Transition Assistance briefings
* pre-discharge activities
* Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) activities, and
* field examiner activities
 | manual date stamp containing red ink. |
| site conducting outreach activities | manual date stamp containing red ink.***Important***: The employee receiving documents at outreach events must also sign their name below the red date stamp. |
| centralized mail (CM) scanning vendor | electronic date stamp containing black ink. |

 |
| Handling Documents Processed Without a Date StampSlides 22-23Handouts 9-10 | Use the guidance in the table below when attempting to determine the date the VA received a document processed without a date stamp.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **If receipt of the document by VA is determined to be…** | **Then…** |
| the current date | stamp the document with an official date stamp. |
| prior to the current date | hand-write the date of receipt on the document. |
| unknown | * hand-write the best estimate for the date of receipt, and
* identify it as an estimate on the document.
 |

***Important***:* All hand-written annotations ***must*** include the
	+ RO number
	+ RO name
	+ employee’s signature, and
	+ current date.
* The “received date” on a fax is an acceptable date stamp for documents faxed and directly indexed into Virtual VA. It is ***not*** necessary to print out such documents, stamp with the date of receipt, and upload back into Virtual VA.
 |
| Placement of the Date Stamp on Incoming DocumentsSlide 24Handout 10 | Place the date stamp on the front of incoming documents in the *bottom, right corner* whenever possible, unless a VA form has a specified location for date stamp. Do not obscure data by covering with date stamp (e.g. images, hand-written or typed text, etc.).Date stamp on the ***first*** page of all* VA forms
* claimant correspondence, and
* cover sheets (from designated representatives (powers of attorney (POAs), attorneys, etc.)

Date stamp the ***first*** and ***last*** page of all medical evidence.***Note***:  Do ***not*** separate batches of incoming mail.  Keep batches together with a staple, rubber band, or binder clip and separately date stamp the evidence items as described above. |
| Date of Receipt for Mail Processed in the CM Portal*Slide 25**Handout 10* | Date of receipt for mail routed through the CM portal is determined by the *earliest* official date* stamped by the RO upon receipt and prior to forwarding to the scanning vendor
* stamped by the scanning vendor, or
* found on documents such as [*VA Form 27-0820*](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/20/cio/20s5/forms/VBA-27-0820-ARE.pdf)*,* *Report of General Information*, or facsimiles.
 |
| Original DocumentsSlide 26Handout 10 | Claimants occasionally submit *original* versions of the following documents in support of their claims* court records and papers, and
* marriage, birth, death, and discharge certificates.

The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) *no longer* requires return of these documents to the claimant.***Note***:  There is ***no*** mechanism in place to retrieve original documents once shipped to the scanning vendor. |

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| Lesson Review, Assessment, and Wrap-up |
| Introduction | The Mail Management lesson is complete. Review each lesson objective and ask the trainees for any questions or comments. |
| Time Required | 15 minutes  |
| Lesson Objectives | You have completed the Mail Management lesson. The trainee should be able to: * Understand the procedures for mail management
* Identify correct date stamping techniques
 |
| Assessment  | Remind the trainees to complete the on-line assessment in TMS to receive credit for completion of the course.The assessment will allow the participants to demonstrate their understanding of the information presented in this lesson. |