Returned Mail

Trainee Handout

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Objectives

* Determine whether returned mail is essential or nonessential
* Identify the procedure for obtaining a correct address for undeliverable essential mail
* Identify the final attempt to obtain an updated address for undeliverable claimant notifications and essential mail

# References

* [M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, Chapter 1, Section 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 3, Section C - System Updates](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014125/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-3-Section-C-System-Updates)

Topic 1: Essential Mail

**Why is understanding undeliverable mail and its process Important?**

Paper mail is a large part of how VBA receives information from Veterans, Veteran’s dependents, Federal and State Agencies, and Private Medical Providers. This mail could have an effect of the VBA’s decision and must be properly reviewed. When mail is undeliverable to the Veteran or the Veteran’s dependents, it is important we are able to distinguish between mail which is essential or directly related to a Veteran’s claim versus nonessential mail which doesn’t directly affect the claim benefit. In this lesson you will learn how to distinguish between essential and nonessential Mail and the procedures for proper handling for both categories.

| **Essential Mail** |
| --- |
| * notices of proposed adverse action
* decision notice
* requests for evidence from
	+ claimants
	+ records centers
	+ other agencies, and
	+ private, third parties
* questionnaires, including those VA uses to verify
	+ dependency status
	+ school attendance, and
	+ employment status
* mail involving matching programs, including the
	+ FTI for upfront verification and IVMs, and
	+ Social Security Verification
* mail affecting benefit entitlement, including
	+ eligibility verification reports (EVRs), and
	+ notices of routine review examinations
 |

***Note***:  Designated intake personnel are responsible for screening and processing all undeliverable mail until adjudication action is required, such as rating or development.

***Exception***:  The IPC is expected to undertake telephone development to obtain a correct address and all steps outlined 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#6c), as instructed.

**Handling Unidentified Mail**

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 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?query=returned%20mail) for handling *unidentifiable* mail.

**Essential Mail**

These documents, forms, notices and other forms of evidence are considered Essential Mail. ([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#6c))

# Examples would be the following:

# VA Form 21-686c, Declaration of Status of Dependents,

# VA Form 21-674, Request for Approval of School Attendance,

# VA Form 9, Appeal to Board of Veteran’s Appeals,

# VA Form 21-4138, Statement in Support of Claim, and/or

# medical reports/records from military or civilian medical facilities.

# Topic 2: Nonessential Mail

| **Nonessential Mail** |
| --- |
| Letters VA releases* as notice of cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs)
* for outreach purposes
* in connection with special projects, such as the Economic Recovery Payment (ERP), and
* to declare a beneficiary’s eligibility for
	+ civil service preference
	+ tax abatement, and
	+ commissary privileges.

***Note***:  Most centrally generated correspondence, such as COLA notices or outreach letters, are mailed in green envelopes to make the identification of nonessential mail easier. |

Upon receipt of undeliverable *nonessential* mail, the IPC user checks to see if the envelope in which VA originally enclosed the mail has a yellow-colored, USPS sticker that shows a forwarding address.

If the sticker with the forwarding address is present

* establish an EP 400 with a correspondence claim label in accordance with [M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, Chapter 3, Section D](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000031819/M21-1%2C-Part-III%2C-Subpart-ii%2C-Chapter-3%2C-Section-D---Claims-Establishment)
* during VBMS establishment, assign the claim to the non-rating lane
* enter undeliverable mail as a contention
* update the beneficiary’s record to reflect the new address using the guidance in [M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, Chapter 3, Section C](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014125/M21-1%2C-Part-III%2C-Subpart-ii%2C-Chapter-3%2C-Section-C---System-Updates) if being screened electronically, download the mail from the portal for printing
* generate a *Return Mail* cover letter using the Letter Creator tool or equivalent letter using Personal Computer Generated Letters (PCGL)
* send the mail and cover letter to the new address
* upload a copy of the cover letter to the electronic claims folder (eFolder), and
* clear the EP 400.

If no forwarding address is present

* upload the mail being screened electronically to VBMS, and
* destroy the returned mail, if screening in paper.

***Notes***:

* All returned mail envelopes received in the RO must be forwarded to the scanning vendor for upload into the Veteran’s claims folder.
* When the original version of undeliverable nonessential email is available in the claims folder, download a clean copy of the letter to re-mail to the claimant instead of using the poorer quality CM scanned version. Ensure the *Return Mail* letter is attached to the top with the proper updated address before returning the mail.

# Topic 3: Obtaining a Correct Address

Because telephone numbers are less likely to change during moves, whenever possible, use telephone development as the first action to obtain a corrected address for undeliverable mail and document the results in accordance with [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#6e).

Follow the steps in the table below when telephone development fails to obtain the correct address for undeliverable essential mail.

| **Step** | **Action** |
| --- | --- |
| 1 | Review the claims folder to ensure the address used on the undeliverable mail matches the current address of record. |
| 2 | Is a yellow-colored USPS sticker that shows a forwarding address on the envelope in which VA originally enclosed the mail?* If *yes*, go to Step 8.
* If *no*, go to the next step.
 |
| 3 | Perform a Share inquiry to determine whether the corporate record, master record, or pending issue has a different or more current address than that shown on the returned mail. Was a different address found?* If *yes*, go to Step 8.
* If *no*, go to the next step.
 |
| 4 | Access Automated Medical Information Exchange (AMIE)/Compensation and Pension Record Interchange (CAPRI) to determine whether the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has a more current address or telephone number.Was a different address found?* If *yes*, go to Step 8.
* If *no*, go to the next step.

***Note***:  If the claims folder shows the last record of contact with the claimant predates the last date of medical treatment shown in AMIE/CAPRI, the address in VHA’s record may be more accurate. |
| 5 | Utilize web-based, address locator services, to include those for which VA pays a fee for access, to search for a correct mailing address. Place or upload a copy of the search results in the claims folder.Was a different and current address found? * If *yes*, go to Step 8.
* If *no*, go to the next step.

***Note***:  VA typically authorizes a limited number of employees per RO to access its fee-based address locator services. |
| 6 | Query Social Security Administration records through Share to determine whether they contain current address.Was a different address found? * If *yes*, go to Step 8.
* If *no*, go to the next step.
 |
| 7 | * Make a VBMS and/or MAP-D note documenting all failed attempts to find a correct address, and
* follow the procedures 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#6e).
 |
| 8 | Is a related EP still pending?* If *yes*, follow the procedures 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#6e).
* If *no*, follow the procedures 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#6f).
 |

***Important***:

* To avoid duplication of efforts, document all attempts to locate a correct address by
	+ associating screen prints of third party address locator service result with the claims folder, and
	+ noting the system(s) used during a search.

**When a New Address is Obtained**

Follow the steps in the table below when:

* a new address is obtained using the guidance 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#6d), and
* the related EP is no longer pending.

| **Letter Type** | **IPC Action(s)** | **Development or Rating Action(s)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| claimant development | * updates the address using the guidance in [M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, Chapter 3, Section C](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014125/M21-1%2C-Part-III%2C-Subpart-ii%2C-Chapter-3%2C-Section-C---System-Updates)
* establishes an EP 930 with an appropriate claim label
* associates the undeliverable mail with the claims folder, and
* assigns the EP 930 to the lane where the original EP was closed.
 | development activity* generates new letter(s) with correct address
* creates new tracked item(s), and
* resends the letter(s) to the claimant.
 |
| third party development | * establishes an EP 930 with an appropriate claim label
	+ includes a note stating *rating action required*
	+ sets the claim status to ready for decision
	+ associates the undeliverable mail with the claims folder and
	+ assigns the EP 930 to the lane where the original EP was closed.
 | rating activity conducts a review in accordance with [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#6h).***Note***:  Use the appropriate claim label for the EP 930* *Non-Rating Control*, or
* *Rating Control*.
 |
| claimant notification | * establishes an EP 400 with a correspondence claim label in accordance with [M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, Chapter 3, Section D](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000031819/M21-1%2C-Part-III%2C-Subpart-ii%2C-Chapter-3%2C-Section-D---Claims-Establishment)
* assigns the claim to the non-rating lane during VBMS establishment
* enters undeliverable mail as a contention
* updates the beneficiary’s record to reflect the new address using the guidance in [M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, Chapter 3, Section C](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014125/M21-1%2C-Part-III%2C-Subpart-ii%2C-Chapter-3%2C-Section-C---System-Updates)
* downloads the mail from the portal for printing if being screened electronically
* generates a *Return Mail* cover letter using the [Letter Creator](http://vbacodmoint1.vba.va.gov/bl/21/LetterGenerator/LG.asp) tool or equivalent letter in PCGL
* sends the mail and cover letter to the new address
* uploads a copy of the cover letter to the eFolder, or associates the letter with the legacy paper claims folder and
* clears the EP 400.

***Important***:  If a new address cannot be located follow the guidance 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#6g). | N/A |
| representative notification | * annotates the representative’s correct address on the
	+ [*VA Form 21-22, Appointment of Veterans Service Organization as Claimant’s Representative*](http://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/VBA-21-22-ARE.pdf), or
	+ [*VA Form 21-22a, Appointment of individual as Claimant’s Representative*](http://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/VBA-21-22A-ARE.pdf), and
* resends letter(s).
 | N/A |
| other essential mail (such as dependency verification, employment questionnaire, etc.) | * updates the address using the guidance in [M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, Chapter 3, Section C](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014125/M21-1%2C-Part-III%2C-Subpart-ii%2C-Chapter-3%2C-Section-C---System-Updates), and
* resends the letter(s) to the claimant.

***Notes***: * If a new address cannot be located follow the guidance 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%20-%206d#6i).
* The pending EP could be an 800 series work item or a controlling EP.
 | N/A |

Topic 4: Final Attempt to Obtain an Updated Address

When an updated address cannot be obtained using the guidance 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#6d) for claimant notifications and other essential mail refer to the table below.

| **Step** | **Action** |
| --- | --- |
| 1 | The IPC* establishes an EP 290 with the claim label Disappearance of the Veteran, and
* assigns the claim to the non-rating lane.
 |
| 2 | The non-rating lane staff takes action as provided in the table below.

| **If direct deposit information …** | **Then non-rating lane staff …** |
| --- | --- |
| is available | sends a Bank Letter.  |
| is not available | follows the guidance 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%20-%206d#6i). |

  |
| 3 | The non-rating lane staff takes further action as provided in the table below after the suspense period for the Bank Letter development has expired or an address is obtained.

| **If an address …** | **Then non-rating lane staff …** |
| --- | --- |
| is obtained | resends the claimant notification and/or other essential mail. |
| is not identified within 30 days of the date the Bank Letter is sent | follows the guidance 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%20-%206d#6i). |

  |

The IPC (Intake Processing Center) is responsible for establishing the EP 290 with the correct claim label of “Disappearance of the Vet” and will assign the claim to the non-rating lane.

At this point the non-rating lane will continue with follow through actions as described 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%20-%206d#6i).

Practical Exercise

Directions: Answer the following questions:

* 1. An example of undeliverable essential mail would be an automatically generated letter from HAINES such as a Cost of Living (COLA) adjustment letter.

Ture or False

* 1. If telephone call to the Veteran is unsuccessful in establishing a new address, which is the best answer for your next steps in the process?
		+ - Send the document to the scanning authority
			- Put a note in VBMS and send the document to the scanning authority
			- Check the envelope for a yellow USPS sticker, then follow the appropriate development in the manual.
			- None of the above.
	2. The IPC (Intake Processing Center) should establish what EP and claim label when an updated address cannot be obtained.
		+ - EP 830 Miscellaneous
			- EP 170 Notice of Disagreements
			- EP 290 Actions upon disappearance of the Veteran (correct)
			- EP 314 IVM Worksheet Review
	3. When identification of a new address is obtained and there is NO EP pending what EP needs to be created if the undeliverable essential mail is a third party development letter?
		+ - EP 930
			- EP 400
			- EP 800
			- None of the above
	4. Refer to question 4, what is the manual reference which cites this procedure?