



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
Veterans Benefits Administration
Washington, D.C. 20420

June 30, 2015

VBA Letter 20-09-10 Revised (4th)

Director (00)
All VBA Regional Offices and Centers

SUBJ: VBA Policy to Maintain Accountability of Official Date Stamps

1. Purpose

This revised policy letter further clarifies guidance concerning the accountability and safeguarding of date stamps. This policy applies to the handling of all Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) incoming mail (U.S. Postal Service, facsimiles, online applications, and emails).

VBA has an ethical and legal responsibility to maintain adequate controls over all date stamps throughout our facilities. Directors will ensure all employees, contractors, and volunteers within their facility and under their areas of organizational responsibility receive and comply with this policy letter. This policy does not apply to Veterans Service Organizations housed in VA facilities.

2. Policy

- a. Manual (hand-held) date stamps will be replaced with electronic date stamps in all VBA regional offices (ROs). Electronic date stamps must be equipped with locking mechanisms to prevent unauthorized use.
- b. Out-based locations with five or more employees are authorized to use either electronic or manual date stamps. Out-based locations with fewer than five employees are authorized to continue to use manual date stamps.
- c. Directors will determine the appropriate numbers and locations of electronic date-stamp equipment required in their ROs and out-based facilities. Number of machines and locations should be minimized to balance operational availability with controlled access.
- d. Date stamps and associated keys must be secured to prevent unauthorized use when not attended by an authorized operator. When the operator is using the machine, the operations key may remain in the machine. When the operator is away from the machine, the machine must be locked and the key removed and securely stored, such as in an individually assigned lockbox. When date stamps are located inside offices,

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the office doors must be locked when the operator is away from the machine and access limited to only those individuals having authority to use the date stamp.

e. Maintenance keys used to update the actual date on the date stamp must be secured and controlled by a designated management official. When not in use the maintenance keys must be secured in a locked office and/or individually assigned lockbox. Directors will designate which management officials are responsible for date stamp maintenance.

f. VAROs will use only black ink with electronic date stamps. All out-based locations are required to use only red ink with both electronic and manual date stamps. Use of red ink for mail received at out-based locations will assist RO employees performing claims-establishment functions in identifying the proper date of claim, and avoid potential confusion when the mail is subsequently received and date stamped in the RO. Out-based machines are treated the same as those located in the RO.

All VBA date stamps, both electronic and manual, must contain the RO name, station number, and date received (mm/dd/yyyy). Electronic and manual date stamps used at out-based facilities should also identify the out-based office where the mail was received. Date stamp machines will be assigned to an operator and an alternate representing the area referenced on the plate on the machine.

g. Employees conducting Transition Assistance and Disabled Transition Assistance briefings, Benefits Delivery at Discharge activities, Integrated Disability Evaluation System activities, field examiner activities, stand-downs, and other public contact and outreach activities where claims or evidence is received will continue to use manual date stamps, but must use only red ink. Employees receiving claims or evidence at a public contact or outreach activity will sign their name below the date stamp.

3. Responsibilities

a. Directors will maintain delegations of authority for all employees authorized to operate electronic date stamp machines and perform date stamp maintenance activities. Employees designated as date stamp operators or alternates are responsible for securing the machines and operation keys during and after working hours to include securing the room when unattended. The designated management official must secure maintenance keys at all times.

b. Employees delegated to use electronic date stamp machines will not grant anyone who is not listed as an operator or alternate operator access to the operations keys, date stamp machines, or the combination and/or key to their assigned lockbox.

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c. An electronic date stamp inventory control log will be created listing the date stamp manufacturer, model, serial number, and assigned location. The Director will determine where the control log will be maintained.

d. The RO's annual inventory of equipment will include an accounting by the Director's office of all electronic date stamps and operations and maintenance keys.

e. All employees, contractors, and volunteers who work within the RO environment will complete the one-time, centralized VA Talent Management System (TMS) assignment, which entails reading this letter and self-certifying understanding of the contents. The initial and subsequent assignments of this VA TMS item will have a two-week suspense and compliance will be monitored nationally. The centralized assignment will occur automatically for future employees, contractors, and volunteers upon establishment in VA TMS with a field office domain.

4. Point of Contact

Questions or comments may be directed to Mr. Eugene Martin, Chief of Administration, at (202) 461-8309.

/s/

Allison A. Hickey
Under Secretary for Benefits