

name and address of the bank, bank contact name, telephone number, number of ATMs the bank has, the number of ATMs dispensing stamps, type of ATM machine(s), the amount of transaction charged (if any); name and address of Post Office to issue stamp stock; and estimated usage per consignment period or month. Send to:

ATM PROGRAM
ALTERNATIVE RETAIL SERVICES
US POSTAL SERVICE
475 L'ENFANT PLAZA SW RM 4347E
WASHINGTON DC 20260-6809

154.3 **Revenue Allocation**

Refer to [153.3](#).

16 Consumer Services

161 **Overview**

A key to effective retail management and delivery services in the Postal Service is a responsive working relationship with the public. The public expects timely and consistent service at affordable rates. The Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) indicates that prompt response to and resolution of customer complaints will increase customer satisfaction with the complaint handling process. The Customer Satisfaction Index, as well as complaints received by telephone, letter, e-mail, facsimile mail, or in person, points out areas where the Postal Service receives low marks from customers and where service needs improvement. Customers also suggest ways to better meet their needs, as well as offer positive feedback for superior service.

162 **Scope**

The following, or their designees, are responsible for implementing these requirements and for informing assigned personnel about local procedures for responding to or forwarding comments received from customers:

- a. Headquarters Consumer Affairs.
- b. Vice presidents, Area Operations.
- c. Customer Service and Sales district managers.
- d. Plant managers.
- e. Consumer Affairs and Claims managers.
- f. Postmasters and station or branch managers.
- g. Postal employees delegated responsibility for handling complaints.

163 **Source of Complaints**

The Postal Service receives complaints, compliments, suggestions, and requests for information from business and residential customers through:

- a. Personal contact, telephone, e-mail, and fax.

- b. Written correspondence, including customer surveys (e.g., the Customer Satisfaction Index).
- c. Headquarters to field referrals (customer correspondence initially directed to the Postmaster General or the Consumer Advocate, then reassigned to the field for resolution).
- d. Inquiries from the legislative and executive branches of the federal, state, and local governments.

164 Responsibility

164.1 Headquarters Management

Headquarters Consumer Affairs is responsible for establishing requirements and measuring compliance with complaint handling and complaint resolution procedures contained in Management Instruction PO-160-2002-1, *Complaint Resolution and Proper Use of Notice 4314-C, We Want to Know*.

164.2 Field Management

The following managers must ensure compliance with comment and complaint resolution procedures and resolve complaints within their areas of responsibility:

- a. Vice presidents, Area Operations.
- b. District managers.
- c. Plant managers.
- d. Consumer Affairs and Claims managers.
- e. Postmasters and station or branch managers.

164.3 Consumer Affairs and Claims Managers

Consumer Affairs and Claims managers must also do the following:

- a. Monitor activity throughout their respective districts for compliance with comment and complaint resolution procedures.
- b. Refer customer complaints to the appropriate functional areas for resolution.
- c. Establish and maintain a customer complaint file.

164.4 Postmasters and Station or Branch Managers

Postmasters and station or branch managers must also do the following:

- a. Ensure that their offices comply with comment and complaint resolution procedures.
- b. Ensure that all employees coming in contact with the public on a regular basis (e.g., retail clerks, city and rural carriers, supervisors, installation managers) have available at their workstations enough Notice 4314-C, *We Want To Know*, for customers.
- c. Prominently display Notice 4314-C in lobbies and box sections, business mail entry units, and other customer service areas at all times.
- d. Maintain one or more customer complaint logs (see [165.3](#)).

- e. Investigate and take corrective action to resolve complaints by contacting and working with other functional areas of the Postal Service, if necessary, to resolve customer complaints.

- f. Establish and maintain a complaint file.

Note: Other postal employees, especially retail clerks, are to provide the customer with a Notice 4314-C or refer the customer to the appropriate functional area.

165 Procedures

165.1 Time Frames

Follow the procedures in the chart below to ensure that the necessary actions are performed within the indicated time frames:

	Time Frame	Action
Initial Contact	Within 24 hours after receiving comment or complaint.	Acknowledge comment or complaint by preprinted postcard, letter, telephone call, or personal contact with the customer.
Final Response	Within 14 calendar days after receiving comment or complaint.	Send a final response to the customer by telephone, letter, or personal contact. The final response must be comprehensive and either describe how the problem was or will be corrected, or explain why the problem cannot be corrected.

165.2 Exception to Final Response Requirement

The final response time discussed above does not apply to complaints requiring issuance of a publication watch for daily, weekly, and monthly newspapers or magazines. All other requirements do apply. Process the publication watch in accordance with Management Instruction PO-440-88-4, *Publication Watch – Revised Form and Procedures*, dated 10/21/88. The time frames for responding to these complaints are as follows:

Type of Publication	Final Response Due
Daily	Within 35 days after complaint received.
Weekly	Within 45 days after complaint received.
Monthly	Within 75 days after complaint received.

165.3 Maintaining Customer Complaint Control Log

Maintain one or more customer complaint control logs at every office to ensure timely response to customer complaints and to facilitate routine analysis of complaint activity. Include the following information in the customer complaint control log:

- a. Office name and ZIP Code.
- b. Customer name.
- c. Company name, if applicable.
- d. Customer address.

- e. Customer telephone number.
- f. Subject of complaint or comment.
 - (1) Type of 24-hour acknowledgement (e.g., telephone, letter, postcard, personal).
 - (2) Type of final response (e.g., telephone, letter, personal).
- g. Date received.
- h. Suspense date.
- i. Assignment of responsibility for suspense and resolution of the complaint.
- j. Date closed.

Note: See Exhibit 165.3.

Exhibit 165.3

Customer Complaint Control Log

Customer or Company Information				Office Name				ZIP Code														
											Type of Contact C = Postcard P = Personal L = Letter T = Telephone Initial (Within 24 hrs) Final		Date Received	Suspense Date	Assigned To	Date Closed						
				Subject	Control No. (CSC)	Name	Address	Phone No.														
				Name	Address	Phone No.																

165.4 Complaint Resolution**165.41 Complaints Resolved Immediately**

If a comment or complaint received over the telephone or in person is resolved immediately, document the contact in the customer complaint control log.

165.42 Further Investigation Required

When local postal management cannot resolve a complaint or comment, the employee provides the customer with a Notice 4314-C, *We Want to Know*. The customer then can choose from the three options on 4314-C.

165.5 Processing Complaints**165.51 Complaints Made in Person**

When local postal management cannot resolve a complaint or comment, the employee provides the customer with a Notice 4314-C, *We Want to Know*. The customer then can choose from the three options on 4314-C.

165.52 Processing a Written Complaint

Transfer all vital information from the customer's letter to the customer complaint control log.

165.53 Processing a Complaint Made by Telephone

Document all vital information of the customer's complaint in the customer complaint control log.

165.6 Headquarters to Field Referrals

The following procedures and duties apply to administrative handling of complaints:

- a. The Consumer Affairs and Claims manager is responsible for transferring information from customer correspondence to the customer complaint control log, for assigning the suspense date, and for ensuring that appropriate response is made within 14 days from the date the district office received the complaint.
- b. Field offices must respond within the assigned suspense date established by the Consumer Affairs and Claims manager.
- c. Acknowledgment will have been made by Headquarters within 24 hours.

165.7 Government Inquiries

Process inquiries from legislative and executive branch officials as follows:

- a. Follow procedures in ASM 338.
- b. Process inquiries regarding service to a postal customer in the area served as written correspondence. These inquiries must receive prompt and conscientious attention.

166 Right of Appeal**166.1 Dissatisfied Customers**

Advise dissatisfied customers that using the methods on Notice 4314-C, *We Want To Know*, doesn't exhaust their opportunity to have the Postal Service consider their complaints and that they may also address their complaints in writing directly to:

CONSUMER ADVOCATE
U S POSTAL SERVICE
475 L'ENFANT PLAZA SW RM 5801
WASHINGTON DC 20260-2200

166.2 Suits Against Postal Service

Advise customers who indicate that they may sue the Postal Service or postal employees or officers that the court in which they file suit may require them first to appeal their complaints in writing to Postal Service Headquarters before the court will consider the matter.

167 Customer Contact Guidelines**167.1 General**

This section provides guidance on how to handle complaints effectively. It does not provide final answers. Absolute rules cannot be established for handling complaints. In each case, judgments must be based on the specific circumstances of how the problem can best be resolved. Each complaint should be given individual treatment. Every individual complaint is important to the customer and to our organization. Not only can a complaint to the Postal Service identify operational problems, it also provides an opportunity to turn a dissatisfied customer into an understanding, informed, and satisfied consumer. Conveying a concerned attitude is an underlying factor in successfully resolving complaints. The general recommended approach is to follow these guidelines:

- a. If the problem was the fault of the Postal Service, an apology should be automatic. To the customer, the person answering the complaint represents the entire Postal Service. The customer should be advised that the Postal Service regrets any inconvenience.
- b. The customer is entitled to know why there was a problem. The customer has, after all, paid for a service that apparently was not received. Most people are responsive to a reasonable explanation.
- c. It is the responsibility of the Postal Service to inform customers of the proper application and use of postal rules and regulations. A customer may well have misunderstood them and should not be criticized for any lack of knowledge in this respect. If possible, explain why the rule or regulation is in effect.
- d. Impress upon the customer that the Postal Service is taking steps to see that the problem does not occur again.

- e. The customer is helping the Postal Service by complaining. A complaint suggests where improvements can be made and helps to spotlight little problems before they become big ones.
- f. Let the customer know that the Postal Service wants to be of help and that we encourage further contact if there are any problems in the future. Emphasize to the customer our concern about the quality of mail service.

Note: If a particularly difficult problem is encountered, consult higher level management about the best way to handle the complaint. A trained Consumer Affairs manager is available in each district to provide additional assistance.

167.2 Receiving Complaints

167.21 In Person

Employees should always greet customers courteously, introducing themselves by name and title. Personal visits (walk-in customers) usually involve critical, time sensitive issues that require immediate action. General guidelines for handling customers include the following:

- a. Discuss the customer's mail problem in a private, uncluttered area, away from the public.
- b. Ask the customer to be seated. Make the customer comfortable, and let the customer explain the problem without unnecessary interruptions. Accept whatever evidence the customer offers to substantiate the complaint.
- c. Tell the customer how long you think it will take to get back with some answers if the problem cannot be resolved immediately. Describe the actions you plan to take. Do not make promises or guarantees that you may not be able to keep.

167.22 By Telephone

Employees should always answer telephone calls promptly, courteously, and clearly. The standard greeting and closing for all incoming telephone calls include the following:

- a. Greet callers in a courteous and professional manner using an appropriate greeting ("Good morning," "Good afternoon," or "Good evening").
- b. Identify the office, department, or functional area.
- c. Identify yourself by name.
- d. Offer assistance (e.g., "May I help you?").
- e. If accusations are made that are known to be unfounded, remain calm. It is better for the customer to express dissatisfaction to the Postal Service than it is for the Postal Service to express dissatisfaction to the public. The Postal Service then has the opportunity to begin correcting the problem.
- f. Before closing each inquiry, thank the customer for calling and offer to be of further assistance should the need arise.

167.23 By Fax

Customer contacts by fax are usually critical in nature and require the following immediate action:

- a. Acknowledge receipt of fax by telephone whenever possible.
- b. Clarify the problem and obtain any additional information needed to investigate the complaint.

167.24 By Letter

Postal employees responsible for handling written customer complaints must acknowledge receipt within 24 hours by preprinted postcard, letter, telephone call, or personal contact.

167.3 Responding to Customer Comments and Complaints**167.31 General**

A delay in responding to customer comments or complaints will only add to a customer's dissatisfaction. A quick response, on the other hand, lets the customer know that the Postal Service cares. Customer comments and complaints can be addressed in person, by telephone, or by letter.

167.32 In Person

Postal employees responsible for responding in person to customer complaints should do the following:

- a. Upon completion of the investigation, you may arrange an appointment with the customer to discuss the results of the investigation.
- b. Thank the customer for bringing the matter to our attention and offer assistance in the future.

167.33 By Telephone

Postal employees who are responsible for responding by telephone to customer complaints should proceed as follows:

- a. Upon completion of the investigation, telephone customers to inform them of the findings. Some customer problems can be answered best by letter, but in many cases a simple telephone call will suffice. Be friendly and informative. Discuss the findings with the customer.
- b. Close the conversation by thanking the customer for bringing the matter to our attention and offer assistance in the future.

167.34 By Letter

Postal employees who are responsible for responding in writing to customer complaints should proceed as follows:

- a. Upon completion of the investigation, write to customers to inform them of the findings. Responses should be concise, grammatically correct, and address the customer's concerns. Assistance may be obtained from the district Consumer Affairs and Claims manager.
- b. The written response must be comprehensive and either correct the problem or explain to the customer why the problem cannot be corrected.

- c. Written responses should close with a paragraph thanking the customer for bringing the matter to our attention and offering assistance in the future.
- d. All responses should be typed, without error, and prepared on official Postal Service stationery.
- e. If the complaint was referred by another or higher level office, provide the originating office with a copy of your letter or report so that the case can be closed at that level.

168 **Measurement of Effectiveness and Benefits**

168.1 **Effectiveness**

Consumer Affairs monitors the quality and timeliness of complaint resolution by conducting reviews of the following:

- a. Customer Satisfaction Index.
- b. Consumer Affairs field audits.
- c. Periodic reports from the Consumer Affairs Tracking System.

168.2 **Benefits**

The Postal Service expects these benefits from reviewing the complaint resolution process:

- a. To improve customer satisfaction with the complaint handling process.
- b. To establish accountability for effective resolution of customer complaints.
- c. To identify and correct service deficiencies that cause complaints.

Note: Postal Service managers are never to be criticized or disciplined based solely on the number of complaints reported.

169 **Other Consumer Services**

169.1 **General**

Report of Postal offenses and requests for information regarding the mistreatment of mail are handled as outlined in the following sections.

169.2 **Reporting Postal Offenses**

Follow instructions contained in DMM G011 for customer reporting, or in ASM 22 for employee reporting. When criminal or serious postal offenses are indicated or suspected, discuss allegations with the Inspection Service. Report immediately any of the following unlawful acts to the Postal Inspection Service:

- a. Theft of mail from any authorized mail receptacle.
- b. Obstruction, interception, tampering, or rifling of mail.
- c. Possible theft, raising the amount (alteration), or counterfeiting of money orders.
- d. Assaults on customers by employees or information concerning assaults on employees.