

Protecting Revenue for Returned Parcel Select Packages

AUDIT REPORT

Report Number 25-053-R25 | September 17, 2025



Table of Contents

Cover

Highlights	1
Background	1
What We Did	1
What We Found	1
Recommendations and Management's Comments	1

Transmittal Letter	2
---------------------------------	---

Results	3
Introduction/Objective	3
Background	3
Finding #1: Omitted Large Package Charges Led to Revenue Loss	7
Recommendation #1	7
Recommendation #2	7
Recommendation #3	7
Postal Service Response	7
OIG Evaluation	8

Finding #2: Ineffective Controls Fueled Postage Due Errors and High Failure Rate for Return Packages	9
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Recommendation #4	13
Recommendation #5	13
Recommendation #6	13
Recommendation #7	14
Recommendation #8	14
Recommendation #9	14
Postal Service Response	14
OIG Evaluation	14
Looking Forward	15

Appendices	16
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Appendix A: Additional Information	17
Scope and Methodology	17
Prior Audit Coverage	18
Appendix B: Management's Comments	19

Contact Information	25
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Highlights

Background

In fiscal year (FY) 2024, the U.S. Postal Service handled more than 11.6 million undeliverable Parcel Select packages that were scanned as return-to-sender. The Postal Service must process these packages at the post offices that serve the original delivery address and the return address. To receive these returns, the addressee must pay postage, which totaled about \$138 million in FY 2024. A U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) investigation found these packages to be vulnerable to theft.

What We Did

Our objective was to evaluate the processes and execution around returned-to-sender Parcel Select packages. We interviewed staff, conducted site visits, and analyzed data for 26.4 million return-to-sender packages from October 2022 to February 2025.

What We Found

The Postal Service did not include the standard charges for large packages in its automated postage due calculations for 1.6 million large return-to-sender packages from October 2022 to February 2025. Despite policy requirements, management excluded charges due to an oversight. As a result, the Postal Service lost about \$29 million in revenue during our scope period. We also estimate it lost \$24 million for additional packages that shippers did not declare as being large packages.

Additionally, we found that the Postal Service processed return-to-sender packages inconsistently and inaccurately. Clerks made errors in postage due calculations, and only 39 percent of packages reached the sender. This occurred because management failed to create effective controls, such as automating processes to reduce human error. Without better controls, the Postal Service will not be able to determine if it collects all the postage it is owed. With over 60 percent of Parcel Select return-to-sender packages not making it back to the addressee, the Postal Service's brand reputation is at risk.

Recommendations and Management's Comments

We made nine recommendations to address the issues identified in the report. Postal Service management agreed with six recommendations and disagreed with three recommendations. Management's comments and our evaluation are at the end of each finding and recommendation. The OIG considers management's comments responsive to recommendations 1, 2, 4, and 5, as corrective action should resolve the issues identified. Recommendations 7 and 8 are closed with the issuance of this report based on our verification of actions taken. We will work with management through the audit resolution process on recommendations 3, 6, and 9. See [Appendix B](#) for management's comments in their entirety.

Transmittal Letter



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

September 17, 2025

MEMORANDUM FOR: AMIT CHOLKAR,
VICE PRESIDENT, ENGINEERING SYSTEMS

ANGELA D. LAWSON
VICE PRESIDENT, TECHNOLOGY APPLICATIONS

JENNIFER T. VO
VICE PRESIDENT, RETAIL AND POST OFFICE OPERATIONS

MARGARET M. PEPE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PRODUCT SOLUTIONS

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Amanda H. Stafford", is positioned above the "FROM:" field.

FROM: Amanda H. Stafford
Deputy Assistant Inspector General
for Retail, Marketing, and Supply Management

SUBJECT: Audit Report – Protecting Revenue for Returned Parcel
Select Packages (Report Number 25-053-R25)

This report presents the results of our self-initiated audit of the processes and execution around returned-to-sender Parcel Select packages.

All recommendations require U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General's (OIG) concurrence before closure. Consequently, the OIG requests written confirmation when corrective actions are completed. Recommendations 1, 2, 4, and 5, should not be closed in the Postal Service's follow-up tracking system until the OIG provides written confirmation that the recommendations can be closed. We consider recommendations 7 and 8 closed with issuance of this report. We view the disagreements with recommendations 3, 6, and 9 as unresolved and plan to pursue them through the audit resolution process.

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesy provided by your staff. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Heidi Einsweiler, Director Sales, Marketing, and International, or me at 703-248-2100.

Attachment

cc: Postmaster General
Corporate Audit Response Management

Results

Introduction/Objective

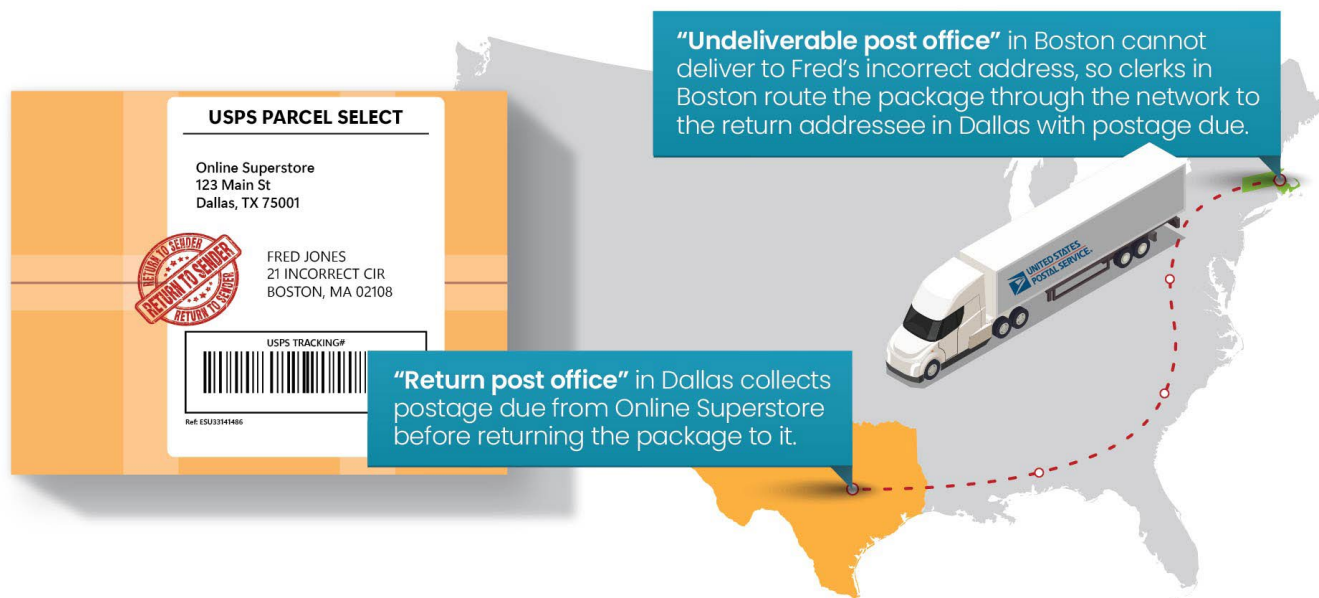
This report presents the results of our self-initiated audit of return-to-sender Parcel Select packages (Project Number 25-053). The audit was based on an internal referral from the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) Office of Investigations, which found that these packages can be vulnerable to theft. Our objective was to evaluate the processes and execution around returned-to-sender Parcel Select packages. See [Appendix A](#) for additional information about this audit.

Background

Parcel Select is the largest U.S. Postal Service package offering by volume, with more than 3 billion packages shipped in fiscal year (FY) 2024. This product is used primarily by large shippers with custom pricing contracts. Parcel Select packages

are dropped close to the delivery point, requiring minimal handling by the Postal Service in exchange for a deeply discounted rate,¹ which does not include return service. About 11.6 million of those packages were scanned “return-to-sender” because the mail carrier flagged them as undeliverable, resulting in about \$138 million in postage due. A package can be undeliverable because of an incorrect or vacant address, because the recipient refused the package, or other reasons. Postal Service clerks must process return-to-sender packages twice, once at the “undeliverable post office” that serves the original delivery address and sends the package back through the Postal Service network, and again at the “return post office” that serves the return address, as shown in Figure 1.²

Figure 1. Return-to-Sender Overview



Source: OIG graphic based on Postal Service standard work instructions.

¹ Compared to prices for Priority Mail, USPS Ground Advantage, and Priority Mail Express.

² We are using the term “post office” throughout this report to refer to destination delivery units, which are postal facilities that house mail carriers.

Processing Packages as Return-to-Sender

The return-to-sender process begins when a clerk processes undeliverable packages in the Remote Forwarding System (RFS) application. RFS determines what the Postal Service will do with the package. If the intended recipient of a Parcel Select package does not have an active forwarding address, RFS flags the package as return-to-sender³ and calculates the postage due. For the system to work properly, the clerk must follow specific procedures within RFS, which include:

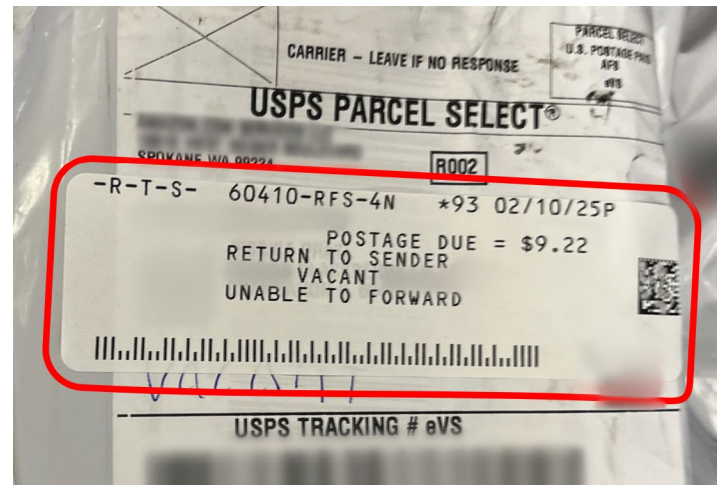
- Scanning the package's barcode.
- Selecting the reason the package was undeliverable (e.g., vacant, refused, etc.), which the mail carrier should have written on the package when they identified it as undeliverable.
- Weighing the package and entering the value into the system, which uses the weight in the postage due calculation. In some cases, the shipper-submitted weight pre-populates when the clerk scans the label, and the clerk should confirm the weight.
- Entering the return address ZIP Code, as written on the label. The system uses that ZIP Code to determine how far the package will travel – a key component of the postage due calculation.

Using the clerk's inputs, RFS prints a small return-to-sender label (outlined in red in Figure 2). If the clerk enters all the required information, the postage due amount is automatically calculated and included on the RFS label.⁴ However, if inputs are missing due to a clerk oversight or error in the steps outlined above, this streamlined function can result in a blank postage due amount printed on the label.

The Postal Service calculates postage due at the commercial USPS Ground Advantage Commercial price, plus a fee.⁵ Large USPS Ground Advantage packages also face additional charges based

on their dimensions.⁶ The clerk should affix the newly created label to the package so that it does not obscure the original label's return address or barcode.

Figure 2. RFS Label



Source: OIG photo taken February 10, 2025.

Simultaneously, RFS records that the package is being returned to the sender in the package's tracking history, which is the key indicator to customers that their package was undeliverable and flagged to be returned. Shippers can build internal analytics around these tracking events and can then notify their customers and address the issue.

With the return-to-sender label affixed, clerks send the package to the postal processing plant so that it can be routed to the return address. The automated mail processing equipment at plants scans the original barcode and the return-to-sender label but prioritizes the return-to-sender label when determining where to direct the package.

Returns Processing and Postage Due Collection

The last part of the return-to-sender process occurs at the return post office, which is the facility that delivers to the return address. A clerk at the return post office must collect the postage due and

³ Shippers can indicate on their package label that undeliverable items should be discarded instead of returned-to-sender. Those packages are outside the scope of this audit.

⁴ The Postal Service began including the postage due amount on the RFS label in July 2024.

⁵ The USPS Ground Advantage price is based on weight and distance. The fee is \$3.60, but is reduced to \$3 if the shipper participates in Address Change Service with shipper paid forwarding and returns.

⁶ These charges are triggered when the package's longest side exceeds 22 inches (\$4) or 30 inches (\$8.40), or if the cubic volume exceeds 2 cubic feet (\$18). The largest packages also pay the "oversized" price, instead of a weight-based price.

applicable fees before the package can be delivered to complete the return. Collecting accurate postage, including fees for larger packages, helps ensure that the Postal Service is compensated for the additional costs associated with the return. For example, large packages require additional fees for special handling at each step along the journey, such as manual sortation due to size constraints prohibiting the use of processing equipment or additional space utilization in trucks.

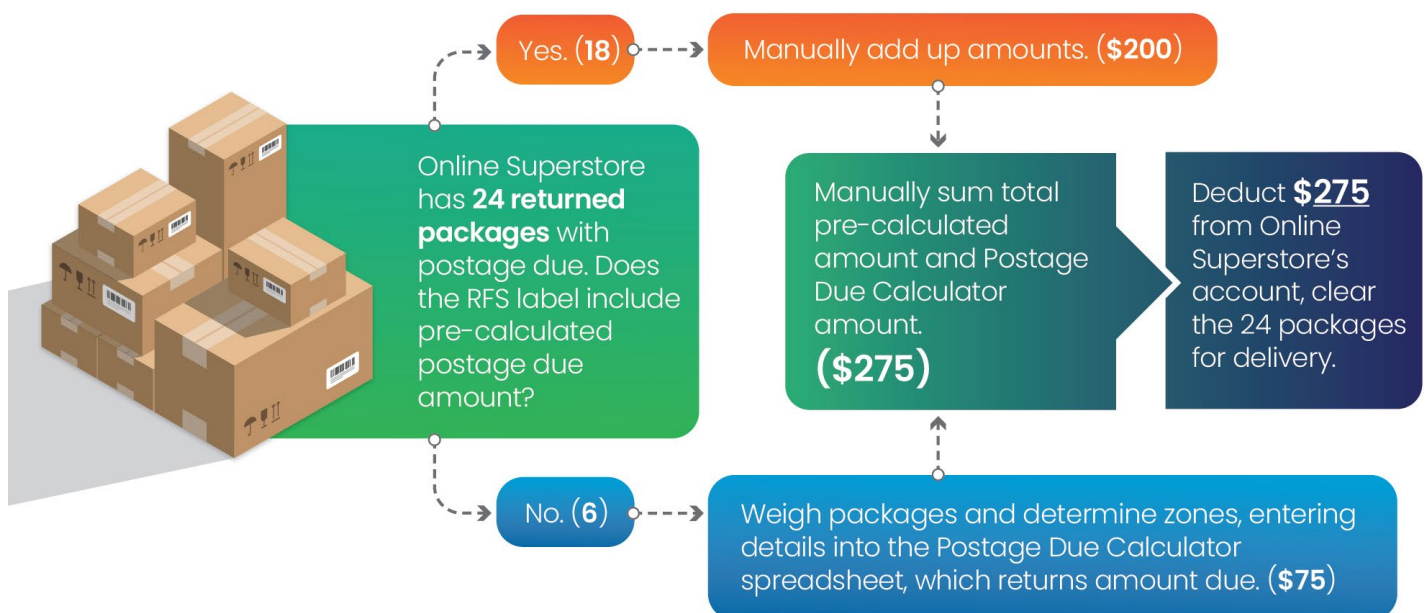
Return post offices that serve large Parcel Select shippers' return facilities can receive hundreds of postage due return-to-sender packages each day. Clerks sort the packages by return address and by whether the RFS label includes the postage due amount. For packages with labels that include postage due, the clerk adds up each shipper's total using a handheld calculator or adding machine.

For packages with blank postage due amounts on their RFS labels, clerks must manually calculate it. They weigh each item and use a Postal Service zone chart to determine the distance traveled, then enter the information into a Postage Due Calculator spreadsheet, which they download from the Postal Service's intranet. The spreadsheet includes formulas that help clerks calculate each item's postage due, which clerks write on each package.

When a customer has multiple packages that are returned, clerks add the total from the Postage Due Calculator spreadsheet to the amount from packages with pre-calculated postage due, as shown in Figure 3 below.

Shippers that receive a high number of return-to-sender packages generally have postage due accounts on file at the return post office. Clerks can automatically deduct the postage due from the account.

Figure 3. Collecting Postage Due for Return to Sender Packages



Source: OIG graphic based on Postal Service standard work instructions and field observations.

If the return addressee does not have a postage due account, the Postal Service delivers a paper postage due notice, asking the recipient to come into the post office to make payment and pick up their package. The clerk enters all postage due items in a Postage Due Log — a paper form that includes details about each postage due item received on a given day. When the return addressee comes into the post office to pay for their item, the clerk notes it on the Postage Due Log.

Return post offices should process the postage due and deliver the packages daily. If they do not, the packages can pile up quickly at high-volume return post offices, which can increase the risk of packages being stolen before they are delivered.

Finding #1: Omitted Large Package Charges Led to Revenue Loss

The Postal Service did not collect package charges for any of the 1.6 million large returned-to-sender packages processed between October 2022 and February 2025, as required by policy.⁷ This included charges for the additional handling of large packages at undeliverable post offices, return post offices, and plants, where large packages can require manual sortation.

The Postal Service did not collect the additional fees, including large package charges, because it did not consider the charges when developing its postage due calculations. Postal Service officials also indicated that customers already paid the large package charges on the initial delivery.⁸ However, those charges only related to the Parcel Select delivery and not the return, which is a separate service. Unlike other postal products that include return service in the total shipping price, such as Priority Mail and USPS Ground Advantage, the Postal Service explicitly excludes return service for Parcel Select packages. Return service for Parcel Select packages requires additional postage as well as fees for large packages to ensure the Postal Service is compensated for the additional costs that large packages generate.

As a result of the Postal Service's exclusion of large package charges, it lost an estimated \$29 million in revenue between October 2022 and February 2025.⁹ This estimate was based, in part, on the dimensions shippers declared at the time of mailing for a sample of return-to-sender packages. The Postal Service's mail processing equipment also captured dimensions on some packages, revealing that shippers frequently under-declared the dimensions. When adjusting for the under-declared dimensions, we estimate that the Postal Service lost an additional

\$24 million in revenue between October 2022 and February 2025.¹⁰

Recommendation #1

We recommend the **Vice President, Technology Applications**, develop a mechanism to identify all applicable charges when calculating postage due to incorporate into its automated calculations.

Recommendation #2

We recommend the **Vice President, Technology Applications**, incorporate large and oversized package charges into postage due calculations for return-to-sender packages.

Recommendation #3

We recommend the **Executive Director, Product Solutions**, retroactively invoice return addressees for large package charges that should have been paid.

Postal Service Response

Management agreed with recommendations 1 and 2, and disagreed with recommendation 3, the finding, and the monetary impact. Regarding the finding, management indicated that retroactive invoicing would set a precedent of shifting pricing responsibility after service was rendered. Management stated that its policies are being applied consistently under the Domestic Mail Manual (DMM), pricing standards, and existing contract terms.

Regarding recommendations 1 and 2, management indicated that the USPS SHIP system allows shippers to enroll in postage due processing, which will include all large package

⁷ *Domestic Mail Manual*, sec. 5071.5.4, requires postage due for undeliverable Parcel Select packages that are returned to sender. See: <https://pe.usps.com/cpim/ftp/manuals/dmm300/507.pdf>. Customers pay the USPS Ground Advantage commercial price, plus an additional services fee. See *Price List Notice 123*, U.S. Postal Service, July 13, 2025, https://pe.usps.com/text/dmm300/notice123.htm#_c451.

⁸ Although Postal Service officials suggested that customers paid the fee on the initial Parcel Select delivery, 98 percent of Parcel Select volume flows through negotiated service agreements, which are custom contracts for special pricing and terms of service that largely excluded large package charges on the initial delivery.

⁹ The \$29 million is based on 29 months of data from October 2022 through February 2025. OIG policy is to categorize only the most recent 24 months (\$24,617,947) as revenue loss, which is recoverable. Revenue loss applies to funds such as postage, retail sales, rent leases, or fees the Postal Service is entitled to receive but was underpaid or not realized because policies, procedures, agreements, or requirements were lacking or not followed.

¹⁰ The \$24 million is based on 29 months of data from October 2022 through February 2025. OIG categorized only the most recent 24 months (\$21,376,852) as revenue loss, which is unrecoverable, as we projected an estimate of the number of likely large packages.

charges. This program is in pilot mode, but will be available for all shippers to enroll by March 30, 2026. The target implementation date for recommendations 1 and 2 is April 30, 2026.

Regarding recommendation 3 and the monetary impact, management raised similar concerns regarding application of the DMM, indicating that it does not charge large package fees for returned packages because the DMM does not specifically call for those fees. Instead, the fees are charged for the initial Parcel Select delivery attempt, not the return. Management further stated that Parcel Select contracts discount or limit these fees, and because returns are not directly addressed in the contracts, the general contract rules apply. Management also stated that the oversized price is applicable for returned packages and is charged at the published or contract rate.

OIG Evaluation

Regarding finding 1, management contended that retroactive invoicing would set a precedent for shifting pricing responsibility after service was rendered. We recommended that the Postal Service attempt to collect unpaid postage due as a one-time effort and correct systemic issues, which make ongoing retroactive invoicing irrelevant. Regarding management's contention that USPS policies are being applied consistently and in accordance with the DMM and contracts, we disagree. The DMM explicitly excludes return service for Parcel Select packages, making it a separate service that is billed at the USPS Ground Advantage Commercial published rate. This rate clearly includes large package charges.

Regarding recommendations 1 and 2, the OIG considers management's comments responsive. Provided that all Parcel Select shippers enroll in

USPS SHIP postage due processing, the corrective actions should resolve the issues identified.

Regarding recommendation 3 and the monetary impact, we disagree that the DMM does not call for the inclusion of large package charges for the following reasons:

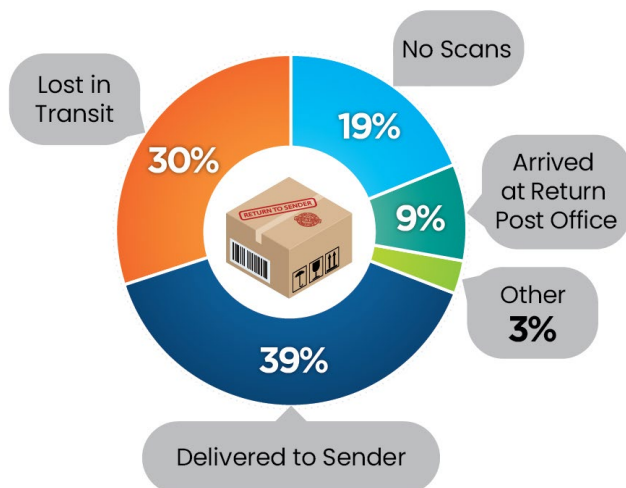
- The DMM explicitly excludes return service for Parcel Select, making the return a separate service. The Postal Service already includes large package charges at the Ground Advantage Commercial published rate in its USPS SHIP postage due calculations, which management is relying on to implement corrective action for recommendations 1 and 2.
- As a separate service, returns are also charged at non-contract rates. Accordingly, return fees should apply regardless of any contractual discounts for initial delivery of Parcel Select packages.
- The Parcel Select contracts specifically state that unless a discount or term is included in the contract, published prices and terms apply. The Postal Service acknowledged that returns are not directly addressed in the contracts, and therefore, published rates should apply. If the Postal Service intended to include returns, the contracts should have incorporated those provisions.

Although we agree with management's statement that the oversized rate is applicable to returns, the current system is not set up to identify packages that meet the size threshold for the oversized price. Further, no packages were assessed at the oversized price during the first week of August 2025. We view the disagreement on recommendation 3 as unresolved and will pursue it through the formal audit resolution process.

Finding #2: Ineffective Controls Fueled Postage Due Errors and High Failure Rate for Return Packages

The Postal Service processed return-to-sender packages inconsistently and inaccurately. Specifically, clerks made errors in the postage due calculations.¹¹ Additionally, Postal Service records show only 39 percent of Parcel Select packages scanned as return-to-sender sampled between October 2022 and February 2025 made it back to the return addressee.¹² About half of the packages in our sample did not reach the return post office, either getting lost in the postal network or receiving no scans at all after they were flagged for return (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Disposition of Return-to-Sender Packages



Source: OIG analysis of scans from a 1,000-piece random sample of Parcel Select packages scanned return-to-sender from October 1, 2022 to February 28, 2025.

These issues occurred because management failed to create an effective system of controls to establish an environment of accountability. These causes and control weaknesses fell into four key categories, each of which is explained below.

An Unauditable Payment System Hampered Identifying and Correcting Calculation Errors

A key cause for the postage due calculation errors was that postage due payments and calculations at return post offices were unverifiable. As a result, postal management was limited in its ability to monitor clerks' postage due calculations or determine whether it collected all the postage owed. Large shippers also could not determine whether they were charged the correct postage due.

Specifically, until July 2024, the Postal Service required return clerks to determine postage due amounts through a Postage Due Calculator spreadsheet, which is a single-use document that is not saved in a central repository. Clerks use the spreadsheet to calculate postage due related to a specific shipper on a specific day. The Postal Service does not save the completed spreadsheets or upload the data into a database. The only records are the handwritten amounts clerks are supposed to write on the packages upon calculating the postage due, which cannot be reviewed once the packages are returned.

This postage due calculation method accounted for all packages up until July 2024, when RFS was changed to pre-populate the postage due calculation for packages where clerks correctly entered all prompts before printing a return label.¹³ Following that July 2024 change, this manual method was still used for packages where clerks received return-to-sender packages with return labels that had blank postage due.

In addition, the Postal Service's systems do not link postage due payments to specific packages. When return post office clerks deduct postage due from the return addressee's account, the system only notes the number of packages and the total postage due. For example, if a shipper receives 24 returns, the Postal Service provides that shipper a list of 24

¹¹ The postage due calculation errors are separate from and unrelated to the omission of large package charges described in Finding 1.

¹² The OIG analyzed a random sample of 1,000 return-to-sender Parcel Select packages. The results have a confidence level of 95 percent and a margin of error of +/-3.1 percent.

¹³ The Postal Service automated RFS to print labels with postage due calculation populated by using shipper-entered weights and dimensions. However, these can be unreliable and still require manual processing to validate.

packages and the total deduction from their account, but it does not provide an itemized list of the return cost for each package. Postal Service officials said shippers noted concerns about this lack of visibility and have requested itemized postage due receipts.

In July 2025, near the end of the OIG’s audit engagement, the Postal Service deployed automatic postage deductions to RFS. The new process creates a package-level, electronic record of postage due calculations and payments. The funds are deducted from the return addressee’s postage due account when the package is processed in RFS. As of the first week of August 2025, the Postal Service had enrolled its largest shipper in the service and was assessing expanding to additional customers. This is an important improvement, and the Postal Service should continue to expand this automation.

Attempts to Automate Did Not Reduce Manual Tasks that Were Vulnerable to Human Error

Another cause for postage calculation errors is that too much of the process was manual and prone to human error. While the Postal Service took important steps to automate postage due calculations in RFS, the automation used weights the shipper entered, which can be unreliable.¹⁴ To work correctly, the automated system still depends on clerks conducting many of the same manual tasks to verify package weights — something clerks frequently failed to do. Three of the 16 post offices we visited did not have operable scales at their RFS workstations, and other clerks stated they did not weigh packages when processing them as return-to-sender. Weight is a key component of postage due calculations, and inaccurate weights lead the Postal Service to charge return addressees the wrong amount. This could hurt customers and the Postal Service alike.

The Postal Service began piloting a system in September 2023 that would use weights captured on the Postal Service’s mail processing equipment to determine the price, though the program had not gone live as of August 2025. Moving forward with

that program could help strengthen the integrity of postage due calculations.

Inadequate Training and Guidance Led to Inconsistent Return-to-Sender Processing

An additional reason for the calculation errors and the high rate of return failures was inadequate training on procedures for processing return-to-sender packages. Clerks at seven of the 16 post offices we visited said they had not received formal training on the policies and procedures for processing return-to-sender packages. Instead, clerks had learned the process from other clerks or by trial and error. The Postal Service also had outdated and inaccurate training materials. The Postal Service did not remove older, conflicting guidance and developed new procedures for processing return-to-sender packages without updating the standard work instructions.

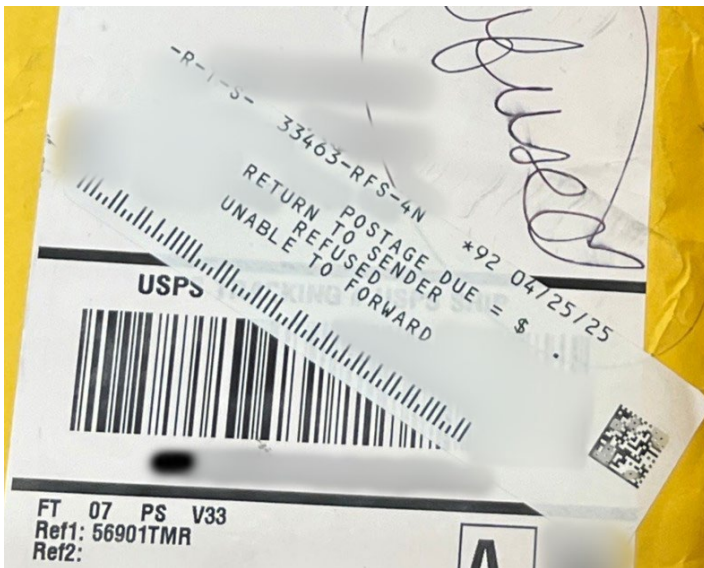
Collectively, problems with training and guidance led to widespread errors in execution that kept the Postal Service from collecting all the postage owed and successfully returning packages. Examples include:

- **Labels incorrectly placed over the barcode.** Due to outdated guidance, clerks frequently placed RFS labels over the existing barcode, in violation of postal policy (see example in [Figure 5](#)). Misplacement of the RFS label is the key reason that 19 percent of return-to-sender packages received no scans after they were flagged for return, as referenced in [Figure 4](#). When the RFS label covers the package’s original barcode, the Postal Service’s processing equipment cannot apply scans to show the package’s path through the network, and the package effectively disappears from the scanning record. We observed this during our site visits, where clerks at eight of 16 post offices placed labels incorrectly. In the past, clerks were instructed to cover the original barcodes and may be following outdated procedures, which are still available on the Postal Service’s website. In 2024, some RFS labels began including a small QR code that replicates

¹⁴ The new RFS automatic postage deductions also rely on declared weights.

the original barcode, allowing the package to accept scans even if the original barcode is obscured. In August 2025, the Postal Service stated that it planned to include the QR code on all RFS labels beginning in October.

Figure 5. Incorrectly Placed Label

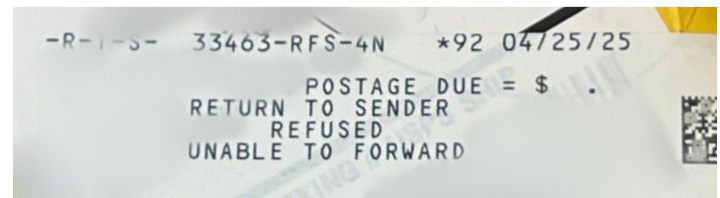


Source: OIG photo taken May 1, 2025.

- **Barcodes not scanned.** Despite established guidance and efforts to promote consistent scanning, an internal RFS report shows clerks failed to scan about 3.7 million of 26.4 million (14 percent) Parcel Select return-to-sender packages in RFS from October 2022 to February 2025.¹⁵ Without these scans, the system did not indicate in those packages' tracking histories that the packages were being returned to the sender, and shippers and recipients were not alerted.
- **Weights not entered.** Although the requirement to weigh packages in RFS went into effect in July 2024, the Postal Service did not incorporate that requirement into its standard work instructions. RFS can only calculate the postage due if the data associated with the package meets certain technical requirements, and to meet that requirement, clerks must enter missing weights.

If clerks do not, the RFS labels will have blank postage due amounts, as shown in Figure 6. As a result of the poor guidance associated with new RFS requirements, 23 percent of Parcel Select return-to-sender packages in February 2025¹⁶ had blank postage due labels because the undeliverable post office clerk did not enter a weight, as required.¹⁷ This pushed the task of calculating postage due to the return post office clerks, who use a laborious and largely manual process that is vulnerable to human error. In our field visits, we interviewed return post office personnel who said they guessed at the postage due amount, did not look up package zones (distance) when determining postage due, who applied the wrong return-to-sender fees, and who charged the wrong fees for packages that exceed the mailable size and weight limits — applying the fees frequently and often without measuring packages to ensure they exceeded the limits.

Figure 6. Blank Postage Due Label



Source: OIG photo taken May 1, 2025.

- **Double charging for fees.** In February 2025, the Postal Service trained clerks at 210 high-volume return post offices using a slide deck that directed clerks to manually add a fee that was already factored into the postage due calculation. We observed one facility that followed those instructions, double-charging customers for the fee. Due to poor controls around manual payment calculations, we could not determine how frequently this occurred across the network.

After the OIG pointed out the outdated standard work instructions and training materials in June 2025, the Postal Service took corrective action on July 3, 2025,

¹⁵ U.S. Postal Service, *Standard Work Instructions: Delivery Unit for RFS*, January 24, 2022. The Postal Service also sent information in a newsletter on July 9, 2024 and a Service Talk on January 16, 2025.

¹⁶ RFS records are only kept for 100 days, so we could not analyze data from our full scope period of October 2022 to February 2025.

¹⁷ U.S. Postal Service, *Standard Work Instructions: Delivery Unit for RFS*, January 24, 2022.

issuing new guidance on processing return-to-sender packages. The Postal Service also added a pop-up warning to the RFS system on July 7, 2025, that makes it more challenging for clerks to process a package without entering a weight. After that, the portion of packages with blank postage due labels fell significantly to 4 percent as of the first week of August 2025. After reviewing the corrective actions the Postal Service took to address our concerns related to training and RFS updates, we agree that these actions met the intent of our recommendations on those topics. As a result, we will close those recommendations upon issuance of this report.

Failure to Establish Physical Controls for Delayed Packages

Another cause for the high rate of return failures is that the Postal Service did not establish adequate physical controls to protect packages awaiting postage due processing, which piled up at return post offices in some isolated cases.¹⁸ Postal Service policy requires employees to protect packages from

damage, tampering, and theft, though there is no specific policy for securing delayed postage due packages. From our sample of 16 post offices, we observed two post offices where large numbers of postage due packages were actively stored in the parking lot for a month or more, and the security gates were open during the day. As a result, the packages were vulnerable to theft and damage, which would harm the Postal Service brand and prevent it from collecting the postage due.

One of the post offices erected tents to give the packages some protection from the weather, though the tents also obscured the security camera's view of the packages, as shown in Figure 7.¹⁹ A second post office we visited had previously stored packages in this same manner. Officials stated they stored packages in the parking lot because they were receiving more volume than they could process daily. With limited space inside the building, staff opted to store packages outside.

Figure 7. Return-to-Sender Packages Stored Outside at Ontario Main Post Office



Sources: Left, Postal Inspection Service security camera image from April 21, 2025; right, OIG photo taken April 30, 2025.

¹⁸ Due to data limitations, we could not quantify how often delayed postage due packages pile up nationwide.

¹⁹ In both instances where packages were stored outside, we verified that the issue has since been resolved.

The OIG has previously identified similar issues at two other facilities. An April 2025 audit found a post office near Phoenix where nearly 28,000 delayed return-to-sender packages were stored outside, awaiting postage due processing.²⁰ In Kansas City, an OIG investigation found an outdoor stockpile of return packages at a post office, as shown in Figure 8 below, and five employees were indicted in May 2025 for allegedly stealing packages from the stockpile, illustrating the very real risk of theft.²¹

Figure 8. Return Packages Stored Outside in Kansas City



Source: OIG investigation.

Collectively, these significant weaknesses presented opportunities for fraud and theft. To begin mitigating these risks, the Postal Service should further automate its postage due calculations to more quickly and efficiently process packages. Where the volume and processing time still results in a stockpile of packages that exceed the post office's physical capacity, the Postal Service should take additional steps to physically secure package overflow. Establishing stronger controls for returned packages would allow the Postal Service to differentiate between poor performing offices where packages were not processed timely or correctly and not returned, and

offices where theft may have occurred. Additionally, by improving training and accountability, the Postal Service could determine better if it is collecting all the postage it is owed.

Return-to-sender packages, by definition, begin as unsuccessful deliveries that can have real consequences for the shipper and the intended recipient. When the Postal Service miscalculated postage due and failed to successfully return packages to the sender, the overall effect compounds that harm. The original intended recipients may have faced additional delays in getting their items, the shippers did not get their items back, and the Postal Service did not collect the postage owed. Due to the ineffective controls with the postage due payment system, we could not determine the specific amount lost.

Recommendation #4

We recommend the **Vice President, Technology Applications**, in coordination with the **Executive Director, Product Solutions**, electronically link the payment of postage due to the specific packages for which the payments are based.

Recommendation #5

We recommend the **Vice President, Retail and Post Office Operations**, in coordination with the **Executive Director, Product Solutions** and the **Vice President, Technology Applications**, further automate the postage due calculation and collection process for undeliverable packages, using weights and dimensions captured by mail processing equipment.

Recommendation #6

We recommend the **Vice President, Retail and Post Office Operations**, assess which delivery units need additional equipment, including scales, and provide it to efficiently process return-to-sender packages.

²⁰ USPS OIG, *Avondale Goodyear Main Post Office, Goodyear, AZ: Delivery Operations*, Report Number 25-046-3-R25, <https://www.uspsig.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2025-04/25-046-3-r25.pdf>.

²¹ USPS OIG, "Former USPS Employees Indicted for Mail Theft," May 8, 2025, <https://www.uspsig.gov/investigative-work/investigative-news-releases/former-usps-employees-indicted-mail-theft>.

Recommendation #7

We recommend the **Vice President, Retail and Post Office Operations**, provide updated training and corrected guidance to clerks and staff on the latest policies and procedures for return-to-sender packages.

Recommendation #8

We recommend the **Vice President, Engineering Systems**, add reminders to the Remote Forwarding System application to prompt clerks to process and weigh packages correctly.

Recommendation #9

We recommend the **Vice President, Retail and Post Office Operations**, institute and enforce a policy requiring clerks and managers to restrict access to return packages that exceed the facility's interior capacity, or develop other mitigation strategies.

Postal Service Response

Management agreed with the finding and recommendations 4, 5, 7, and 8, but disagreed with recommendations 6 and 9. Regarding recommendation 4, management indicated that the USPS SHIP system allows shippers to enroll in postage due processing and will link payments to specific packages. This program is in pilot mode, and all shippers will be eligible by March 30, 2026. The Postal Service set a target implementation date of April 30, 2026.

Regarding recommendation 5, management pointed to its recent RFS enhancement to automatically deduct postage due for one customer. In addition, management indicated it plans to leverage the same pilot, which will also calculate postage due using weights and dimensions as measured by mail processing equipment. The Postal Service set a target implementation date of April 30, 2026.

Regarding recommendation 6, management announced requirements for every delivery unit to have RFS scales and related scanners,

and deployed a dashboard to track RFS data to identify delivery units that do not have the required equipment. Management requested that the recommendation be closed upon the issuance of this report.

Regarding recommendation 7, management updated and shared its training materials and standard work instructions for return-to-sender processing. Management requested that the recommendation be closed upon the issuance of this report.

Regarding recommendation 8, management updated RFS to prompt clerks to validate package weight, which was activated July 7, 2025, to align with field notification. Management requested that the recommendation be closed upon the issuance of this report.

Regarding recommendation 9, management stated that recent system updates will prevent packages from piling up. Additionally, it stated it has a system in place to identify and address backlogs for one shipper. As such, management requested that the recommendation be closed upon the issuance of this report.

OIG Evaluation

Regarding recommendations 4 and 5, the OIG considers management's comments responsive. Provided that all Parcel Select shippers enroll in USPS SHIP postage due processing, the corrective actions should resolve the issues identified.

Regarding recommendation 6, our recommendation was to provide the proper equipment for offices that need it, whereas management focused on establishing a policy that equipment is required rather than providing the equipment. It is also deploying a dashboard to track equipment usage based on RFS data, but the dashboard tracks weight entries and would not identify instances where clerks entered guessed package weights into RFS, which we observed during our field visits. We view the disagreement on the recommendation as

unresolved and will pursue it through the formal audit resolution process.

Regarding recommendations 7 and 8, the OIG considers the recommendations closed based on our review and verification of the actions implemented by the Postal Service that provided return-to-sender training and RFS prompts to promote clerks including package weights.

Regarding recommendation 9, management streamlined automatic postage deduction and developed a ticketing system for escalation. However, this system is only active for a single shipper, as of June 2025, and had only received one request during the previous eight months. While this reduces security concerns for one customer, it does not sufficiently mitigate the risk of damage and theft due to packages being stored outside. We view the disagreement on the

recommendation as unresolved and will pursue it through the formal audit resolution process.

Looking Forward

Taking steps to begin establishing controls around return-to-sender packages is critical to revenue protection. Despite system enhancements, the Postal Service cannot identify the scale of potential revenue loss associated with inconsistent and inaccurate processing. Due to the poor controls with the postage due payment system, we could not determine the specific amount of revenue lost. However, given the types of errors and miscalculations we observed, in addition to the high rate of packages that were not successfully returned, it was likely significant. Implementation of key controls to ensure it collects accurate revenue will help improve the overall financial posture at a critical juncture for the Postal Service.

Appendices

- Appendix A: Additional Information.....17**
 - Scope and Methodology17
 - Prior Audit Coverage 18
- Appendix B: Management’s Comments..... 19**

Appendix A: Additional Information

Scope and Methodology

Our audit scope was return-to-sender Parcel Select packages from October 2022 through February 2025. To accomplish our objective, we:

- Analyzed data on the 26.4 million return-to-sender packages shipped during our scope period. This included analyzing the scanning records for a 1,000-piece sample and reviewing RFS records and data.
- Reviewed Postal Service policies and standard work instructions related to undeliverable-as-addressed and return-to-sender packages.
- Interviewed Postal Service officials about the processing of return-to-sender packages and the collection of postage due.
- Performed site visits at 18 judgmentally selected postal facilities, including 16 post offices and two plants. While there, we observed the processing of return-to-sender packages and the postage due collection, and we interviewed Postal Service postmasters, supervisors, and clerks.
- Reviewed past USPS OIG work.

We conducted this performance audit from March through September 2025 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards and included such tests of internal controls as we considered necessary under the circumstances. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We believe

that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We discussed our observations and conclusions with management on August 12, 2025, and included its comments where appropriate.

In planning and conducting the audit, we obtained an understanding of Parcel Select return-to-sender internal control structure to help determine the nature, timing, and extent of our audit procedures. We reviewed the management controls for overseeing the program and mitigating associated risks. Additionally, we assessed the internal control components and underlying principles, and we determined that the following four components were significant to our audit objective: risk assessment, control activities, information and communication, and monitoring.

We developed audit work to ensure that we assessed these controls. Based on the work performed, we identified internal control deficiencies related to risk assessment, control activities, information and communication, and monitoring that were significant within the context of our objectives. Our recommendations, if implemented, should correct the weaknesses we identified.

We assessed the reliability of the Postal Service's Product Tracking and Reporting and RFS data by reviewing and analyzing the package scan data and interviewing Postal Service officials. We determined that the data was sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

Prior Audit Coverage

Report Title	Objective	Report Number	Final Report Date	Monetary Impact
<i>Postal Service Oversight of Parcel Select</i>	To evaluate the U.S. Postal Service's administration of policy and contractual requirements and revenue collection with its largest package customers.	24-044-R25	12/19/2024	[REDACTED]
<i>Effectiveness of Package Shipping Services</i>	To evaluate the service performance and effectiveness of package shipping services.	24-013-R24	07/12/2024	\$0
<i>Delivery & Customer Service in Colorado Mountain Towns</i>	To determine the root causes of poor service performance and customer service issues in Colorado mountain towns.	23-130-R24	12/05/2023	\$0
<i>Parcel Select Billing Determinants Process & Procedures</i>	To assess the competitive Parcel Select billing determinant process for FYs 2021 and 2022.	23-111-R23	09/18/2023	\$0
<i>Shipping Services Contract Compliance</i>	To assess contractual compliance and oversight of the Parcel Select shipping services contract.	20-315-R22	10/19/2021	\$63,661

Appendix B: Management's Comments



September 5, 2025

LAURA LOZON
ACTING DIRECTOR, AUDIT SERVICES

SUBJECT: Management Response: *Protecting Revenue for Returned Parcel Select Packages (25-053-DRAFT)*

Thank you for providing the Postal Service with an opportunity to review and comment on the findings and recommendations contained in the draft audit report, *Protecting Revenue for Returned Parcel Select Packages (25-053-DRAFT)*

Finding # 1: Omitted Large Package Charges Led to Revenue Loss

Management disagrees:

Retroactive invoicing would set a precedent of shifting pricing responsibility after service was rendered. USPS policies are being applied consistently under the DMM, Notice 123, and existing NSA terms.

Finding # 2: Ineffective Controls Fueled Postage Due Errors and High Failure Rate for Return Packages

Management agrees: Improvements in postage due processing are necessary to reduce failures. Steps to enhance the process and training materials for proper execution at the post office level have been implemented.

Monetary Impact:

Management disagrees with the Monetary Impact and supports a zero-dollar impact based on the following reasons: Parcel Select return packages (UAA) sent back with postage due at the USPS Ground Advantage–Commercial rate:

- There is no specific callout for the application of non-standard fees in the DMM.
- If a package is too long (over 22" or 30") or over 2 cubic feet, non-standard fees apply at acceptance (not on returns) - based on weight, size (DIM), and distance per USPS rate tables (Notice 123).
- NSA contracts: non-standard fees are either discounted or limited to a small percentage of qualifying packages.
- UAA returns aren't directly addressed in contracts, so they follow the general contract rules for non-standard fees.
- Oversized packages (108"–130" in combined length and girth) are charged at the oversized rate listed in Notice 123 or the contract rate.
- Postal Service collects postage due on UAA Parcel Select packages from shippers via postage due accounts

The following are our comments on each of the nine recommendations.

Recommendation 1: We recommend the **Vice President, Technology Applications**, develop a mechanism to identify all applicable charges when calculating postage due to incorporate into its automated calculations

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management **agrees** with this recommendation.

USPS Ship allows shippers to enroll in Postage Due processing via Account Management. Enrollment data is provided to the National Customer Support Center (NCSC) system. Currently, USPS Ship uses attributes sampled across all scans for an individual package and provides that information to the NCSC system. NCSC retrieves the scan attribute data, which would include Non-Standard Length/Oversized information, calculate postage due pricing, and provide the priced packages back to USPS Ship. USPS Ship retrieves packages priced for postage due and charges the shipper's Enterprise Payment System (EPS) Account (EPA). Packages priced for Postage Due and Postage Due transactions are available via the **Transaction Details Report** Informed Visibility Mail Tracking & Reporting (IV-MTR) USPS Ship data feed for USPS Ship customers.

Currently, there are 5 unique customers remaining on eVS and they will be migrating to USPS Ship no later than 2/1/2026. Currently, the Postage Due program is in "Pilot" mode, but will be available for all shippers to enroll in by March 30,

Target Implementation Date: 04/30/2026

Responsible Official:

Sr. Director Commerce Application

Recommendation 2: We recommend the **Vice President, Technology Applications**, incorporate large and oversized package charges into postage due calculations for return-to-sender packages.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management **agrees** with this recommendation.

USPS Ship allows shippers to enroll in Postage Due processing via Account Management. Enrollment data is provided to the National Customer Support Center (NCSC) system. Currently, USPS Ship uses attributes sampled across all scans for an individual package and provides that information to the NCSC system. NCSC retrieves the scan attribute data, which would include Non-Standard Length/Oversized information, calculate postage due pricing, and provide the priced packages back to USPS Ship. USPS Ship retrieves packages priced for postage due and charges the shipper's Enterprise Payment System (EPS) Account (EPA). Packages priced for Postage Due and Postage Due transactions are available via the **Transaction Details Report** Informed Visibility Mail Tracking & Reporting (IV-MTR) USPS Ship data feed for USPS Ship customers.

Currently, there are 5 unique customers remaining on eVS and they will be migrating to USPS Ship no later than 2/1/2026. Currently, the Postage Due program is in "Pilot" mode, but will be available for all shippers to enroll in by March 30,

Target Implementation Date: 04/30/2026

Responsible Official:

Sr. Director Commerce Application

Recommendation 3: We recommend the **Executive Director, Product Solutions**, retroactively invoice return addresses for large package charges that should have been paid.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management **disagrees** with this recommendation.

- Postal Service does not charge for Oversized Package rate of returned Parcel Select pieces, as defined in DMM 507 1.5.4:

- Piece returned with reason for non-delivery attached; return postage charged at the applicable Package Services single-piece price or the USPS Ground Advantage — Commercial price plus the additional service fee
- Exhibit 1.5.4 Treatment of Undeliverable Package Services and Parcel Select

- Parcel Select return packages (UAA) sent back with postage due at the USPS Ground Advantage—Commercial rate:
 - There is no specific callout for application of non-standard fees in the DMM.
 - If a package is too long (over 22" or 30") or over 2 cubic feet, non-standard fees apply at acceptance (not on returns) - based on weight, size (DIM), and distance per USPS rate tables (Notice 123).
 - NSA contracts: non-standard fees are either discounted or limited to a small percentage of qualifying packages.
 - UAA returns aren't directly addressed in contracts, so they follow the general contract rules for non-standard fees.
 - Oversized packages (108"–130" in combined length and girth) are charged at the oversized rate listed in Notice 123 or the contract rate.
 - Postal Service collects postage due on UAA Parcel Select packages from shippers via postage due accounts

MAILER ENDORSEMENT	USPS Treatment of UAA Pieces
No Endorsement	<p>In all cases: Same treatment as "Forwarding Service Requested."</p> <p>Exception: USPS disposes of Bound Printed Matter (BPM) flat-sized pieces with no mailer endorsement that does not have an eligible extra service, and BPM parcels with USPS Tracking, Signature Confirmation, or Signature Confirmation Restricted Delivery, but with no other eligible extra service.</p>
"Forwarding Service Requested" ²	<p>If no change-of-address order on file: Piece returned with reason for nondelivery attached; return postage charged at the applicable Package Services single-piece price or the USPS Ground Advantage — Commercial price plus the additional service fee.</p>

Target Implementation Date: N/A

Responsible Official: N/A

Recommendation 4: We recommend the **Vice President, Technology Applications**, in coordination with the **Executive Director, Product Solutions**, electronically link the payment of postage due to the specific packages for which the payments are based.

Management Response/Action Plan:
Management **agrees** with this recommendation.

USPS Ship allows shippers to enroll in Postage Due processing via Account Management. Enrollment data is provided to the National Customer Support Center (NCSC) system. Currently, USPS Ship uses attributes sampled across all scans for an individual package and provides that information to the NCSC system. NCSC retrieves the scan attribute data, which would include Non-Standard Length/Oversized information, calculate postage due pricing, and provide the priced packages back to USPS Ship. USPS Ship retrieves packages priced for postage due and charges the shipper's Enterprise Payment System (EPS) Account (EPA). Packages priced for Postage Due and Postage Due transactions are available via the **Transaction Details Report** Informed Visibility Mail Tracking & Reporting (IV-MTR) USPS Ship data feed for USPS Ship customers.

Currently, there are 5 unique customers remaining on eVS and they will be migrating to USPS Ship no later than 2/1/2026. Currently, the Postage Due program is in "Pilot" mode, but will be available for all shippers to enroll in by March 30, 2026

Target Implementation Date: 04/30/2026

Responsible Official:

Sr. Director Commerce Application

Recommendation 5: We recommend the **Vice President, Retail and Post Office Operations**, in coordination with the **Executive Director, Product Solutions** and the **Vice President, Technology Applications**, further automate the postage due calculation and collection process for undeliverable packages, using weights and dimensions captured by mail processing equipment.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management **agrees** with this recommendation.

Management provided OIG with evidence of an automated deduction process of postage due through Remote Forwarding System (RFS) that calculates postage due fees and collects the fees through PostalOne! directly from customer's postage due accounts when available and funded. OIG deemed these as sufficient corrective actions that speak to the first part of the recommendation.

In reference to the remaining actions associated with this recommendation, USPS Ship allows shippers to enroll in Postage Due processing via Account Management. Enrollment data is provided to the National Customer Support Center (NCSC) system. Currently, USPS Ship uses attributes sampled across all scans for an individual package and provides that information to the NCSC system. NCSC retrieves the scan attribute data, which would include Non-Standard Length/Oversized information, calculate postage due pricing, and provide the priced packages back to USPS Ship. USPS Ship retrieves packages priced for postage due and charges the shipper's Enterprise Payment System (EPS) Account (EPA). Packages priced for Postage Due and Postage Due transactions are available via the **Transaction Details Report** Informed Visibility Mail Tracking & Reporting (IV-MTR) USPS Ship data feed for USPS Ship customers.

Currently, there are 5 unique customers remaining on eVS and they will be migrating to USPS Ship no later than 2/1/2026. Currently, the Postage Due program is in "Pilot" mode, but will be available for all shippers to enroll in by March 30, 2026

Target Implementation Date: 04/30/2026

Responsible Official:

Sr. Director Commerce Application

Recommendation 6: We recommend the **Vice President, Retail and Post Office Operations**, assess which delivery units need additional equipment, including scales, and provide it to efficiently process return-to-sender packages.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management **disagrees** with this recommendation.

The auto deduction of postage due was announced by the Vice President Retail and Post Office Operations. The announcement reiterated the requirement for every unit to have a scale, tethered scanner or DSS ring scanner available for processing UAA return parcels.

Management deployed a Power BI dashboard that provides insight on all aspects of RFS processing down to the individual office level. The dashboard has the capability of displaying the number of tethered scans vs. manually keyed pieces, the number of blank postage due labels generated, pre-calculated postage due labels, and auto deducted postage due labels. Offices generating only blank labels is a flag that a scale is not being utilized/in place. Offices using only manual keying is an indication that a tethered scanner is not utilized/in place. Management has provided evidence that these actions were completed and is requesting Closure at Issuance.

Target Implementation Date: N/A

Responsible Official: N/A

Recommendation 7:

We recommend the **Vice President, Retail and Post Office Operations**, provide updated training and corrected guidance to clerks and staff on the latest policies and procedures for return-to-sender packages.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management **agrees** with this recommendation.

Retail and Post Office Operations updated/shared all training materials/standard work instructions and posted the most current resources to the CRDO Library. Management has provided evidence to the OIG that actions were sufficient to request Closure at Issuance.

Target Implementation Date: 9/30/2025

Responsible Official:

Director, Post Office Operations

Recommendation 8: We recommend the **Vice President, Engineering Systems**, add reminders to the Remote Forwarding System application to prompt clerks to process and weigh packages correctly.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management **agrees** with this Recommendation. An enhancement was implemented under Remote Forwarding System (RFS) application release v4.0.0 to prompt the clerk with a popup warning message to acknowledge/validate the item weight. The RFS application software was released 6/8/25, but the Postage Due feature was not enabled/activated until 7/7/25 to align with CRDO field notification. The OIG agreed (Page 10, 3rd paragraph of the report) that the Postal Services corrective actions met the intent of the recommendation. Management requests to close the recommendation with the issuance of the final.

Target Implementation Date: N/A

Responsible Official:

Vice President, Engineering Systems

Recommendation 9: We recommend the **Vice President, Retail and Post Office Operations**, institute and enforce a policy requiring clerks and managers to restrict access to return packages that exceed the facility's interior capacity or develop other mitigation strategies.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management **disagrees** with this recommendation.

Management shared with OIG the recent introduction of the RFS auto deduction and the pre-calculation process and how it has streamlined the processing and delivery of UAA postage due parcels. This new process removes much of the manual work that caused the backlog of parcels at select delivery facilities. Offices are able to now process parcels more quickly and with less steps - allowing the mail to be moved expeditiously and eliminating the risk of exceeding a facility's interior capacity.

In addition, if a unit has delivery issues regarding customer acceptance/logistic concerns in moving the mail, Management has developed a Retail and Delivery Applications & Reports (RADAR) ticketing system for escalation. Tickets are forwarded to the stakeholders (████████ Account Management Team), and the team will work with offices to complete a transportation request when volume exceeds their daily capacity. Offices receiving four or more gaylords of volume/day, will typically be approved for logistic assistance.

Management has requested Closure at Issuance.

Target Implementation Date: N/A

Responsible Official: N/A

E-SIGNED by AMIT CHOLKAR
on 2025-09-05 12:41:13 EDT

AMIT CHOLKAR
VICE PRESIDENT, ENGINEERING SYSTEMS

E-SIGNED by ANGELA D LAWSON
on 2025-09-05 15:57:15 EDT

ANGELA D. LAWSON
VICE PRESIDENT, TECHNOLOGY APPLICATIONS

E-SIGNED by Jennifer Vo
on 2025-09-05 15:14:16 EDT

JENNIFER T. VO
VICE PRESIDENT, RETAIL AND POST OFFICE OPERATIONS

E-SIGNED by MARGARET M PEPE
on 2025-09-05 13:54:38 EDT

MARGARET M. PEPE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PRODUCT SOLUTIONS

cc: *Corporate Audit & Response Management*

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE



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1735 North Lynn Street, Arlington, VA 22209-2020
(703) 248-2100

For media inquiries, please email press@uspsoig.gov or call (703) 248-2100