



Highlights of [GAO-06-733](#), a report to Congressional requesters

# U.S. POSTAL SERVICE

## Delivery Performance Standards, Measurement, and Reporting Need Improvement

### Why GAO Did This Study

U.S. Postal Service (USPS) delivery performance standards and results, which are central to its mission of providing universal postal service, have been a long-standing concern for mailers and Congress. Standards are essential to set realistic expectations for delivery performance and organize activities accordingly. Timely and reliable reporting of results is essential for management, oversight, and accountability purposes. GAO was asked to assess (1) USPS's delivery performance standards for timely mail delivery, (2) delivery performance information that USPS collects and reports on timely mail delivery, and (3) progress made to improve delivery performance information.

### What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that USPS take actions to modernize its delivery standards, implement delivery performance measures for major types of mail by providing clear commitment and more effective collaboration, and improve the transparency of delivery performance standards, measures, and results. In commenting on a draft of this report, USPS disagreed that its standards are outdated and detailed its vision to improve service measures and transparency. USPS did not directly comment on three of our four recommendations. On our transparency recommendation, USPS said that its standards should be more visible and is exploring providing more of this information.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-733](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-733).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Katherine Siggerud at (202) 512-2834 or [siggerudk@gao.gov](mailto:siggerudk@gao.gov).

### What GAO Found

USPS has delivery standards for its major types of mail, but some have not been updated in a number of years to reflect changes in how mail is prepared and delivered. These outdated standards are unsuitable as benchmarks for setting realistic expectations for timely mail delivery, measuring delivery performance, or improving service, oversight, and accountability. USPS plans corrective action to update some standards. Also, some delivery standards are not easily accessible, which impedes mailers from obtaining information to make informed decisions.

USPS does not measure and report its delivery performance for most types of mail. Therefore, transparency with regard to its overall performance in timely mail delivery is limited. As shown in the table below, representative measures cover less than one-fifth of mail volume and do not include Standard Mail, bulk First-Class Mail, Periodicals, and most Package Services. Despite recent disclosures on its Web site, USPS's reporting is more limited than the scope of measurement. Without sufficient transparency, it is difficult for USPS and its customers to identify and address delivery problems, and for Congress, the Postal Rate Commission, and others to hold management accountable for results and conduct independent oversight.

USPS Delivery Standards, Measurement, and Reporting				
Type of mail	Delivery standards	Mail volume (percent)	Representative measurement	Reporting on USPS Web site
Standard Mail	3-10 days	48	None	None
First-Class Mail: <i>bulk mail</i>	1-3 days	25	None	None
First-Class Mail: <i>single-piece</i>	1-3 days	22	Partial	Partial
Periodicals	1-7 days	4	None	None
Package Services	1-9 days	1	Partial	Partial
Priority Mail	1-3 days	<sup>a</sup>	Partial	Partial
International Mail	2 days to 6 weeks	<sup>a</sup>	Partial	None
Express Mail	1-2 days	<sup>a</sup>	Full	Partial

Source: GAO analysis of USPS information.

<sup>a</sup>Less than 0.5 percent.

Progress to improve delivery performance information has been slow and inadequate despite numerous USPS and mailer efforts. Some impediments to progress include USPS's lack of continued management commitment and follow through on recommendations made by joint USPS/mailer committees, as well as technology limitations, data quality deficiencies, limited mailer participation in providing needed performance data, and costs. Although USPS has initiatives to improve service and better track mail through its mail processing system, USPS has no current plans to implement and report on additional representative measures of delivery performance. USPS's leadership and effective collaboration with mailers is critical to implementing a complete set of delivery performance measures.