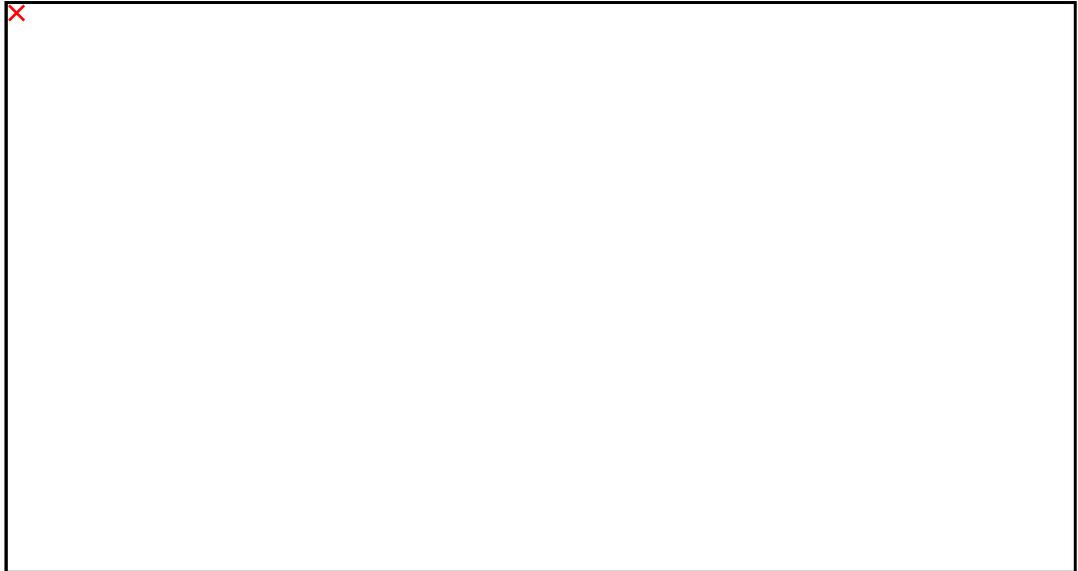


Postal service sets holiday mailing guidelines

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WASHINGTON,
Nov. 3, 2008 – As
the holidays
approach and
military families
start thinking about
what they're going
to send loved ones
serving overseas,
there are a few
dates to keep in
mind.



"The earliest deadline is for troops that are serving in the Iraq [and] Afghanistan area," said Al DeSarro, spokesman for the western region of the U.S. Postal Service. "You want to send all your holiday mail and packages [to those areas] by Dec. 4."

Holiday mail, including packages and cards, going to military bases in other parts of the world should be shipped by Dec. 11, he said.

"We do encourage people to closely follow these deadlines," DeSarro said. "Of course, we make every attempt, even if you miss the deadline, to deliver the mail to our troops."

Pseudo-Santas who can't beat those dates have another option to get holiday goodies to their destinations in time: Express Mail. But it will cost a bit more and it's not available for servicemembers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Priority Mail Flat-Rate boxes are the best value when shipping to military members serving at home or anywhere overseas, DeSarro said. The largest flat-rate box costs \$10.95 to ship to an APO or FPO address. That's a \$2 discount, and the boxes are free.

The flat-rate boxes come with another bonus. If it will fit in the box, and weighs 70 pounds or less, it ships at the established rate.

"We also offer a special military package kit, ... and this applies even if you want to send to our

troops here in the U.S.," DeSarro said. "If you call ... 1-800-610-8734, they'll send you a free kit of packaging materials -- priority mail boxes, tape, labels and stuff that can make your holiday packing much easier."

When shipping any holiday package, there are some basic guidelines to take into consideration, he added. If a USPS-provided box isn't being used, senders should make sure the box they're using is sturdy. Don't use wrapping paper or string on the outside, and print both the shipping and return addresses clearly. Contents should be packaged securely and in leak-proof containers, and consider the customs of the country to ensure the items are appropriate and acceptable.

USPS also suggests including the mailing address, return address and the contents of the box on a slip of paper with the other contents, just in case something out of the ordinary should happen.

Following not only the shipping date guidelines, but also the general packing guidelines can help the USPS get packages where they're going during their busiest time of the year.

DeSarro urges people to mail as much as they want and