

USPS Suggests Ways to Protect Items from Effects of Irradiation

The United States Postal Service (USPS) offers advice to protect items like collectable paper money from the harmful effects of electron irradiation.

American Numismatic Association (ANA) President John W. Wilson says, "The Postal Service is using irradiation to guard against the spread of anthrax through the mail system. While the ANA is fully supportive of this procedure, we recognize that this high-temperature process can damage some numismatic items. To prevent such harm, we recommend that collectors and others mailing collectable material, especially paper money, follow the advice from the Postal Service."

In a January 22, 2002, news release posted on the USPS web site (www.usps.gov/news/2001/press/mailsecurity/updwash.htm), postal officials say that currently only mail "with stamps for postage" addressed to government agencies in the ZIP code ranges 202-205 (Washington, D.C., area) will continue to undergo irradiation.

Express and Priority Mail with meter strips, corporate accounts or permit indicia and registered mail is not irradiated, according to the Postal Service. "Customers and businesses sending mail to ZIP Codes 202-205 can avoid the irradiation process by affixing postage meter strips or permit indicia instead of postage stamps to Express or Priority Mail," postal officials state. "The use of corporate accounts for Express Mail or registered mail also is another way to avoid the irradiation process."

The USPS says irradiated mail "may exhibit a discolored (tan-colored) quality, as well as be brittle, show spots on envelopes and make address labels unreadable. Documents bound with glue may have loose pages and some mail may have fused pages. If tape is affixed to address labels, the address will likely not be readable after being irradiated. The type of damage depends on the fiber content of the paper."

U.S. Postal Service officials say that "for the foreseeable future" they will continue to irradiate "letters, flats, Express and Priority Mail with stamps for postage and other packages with stamps for postage." They add that "at this time, irradiation is the only process used by the Postal Service to sanitize the mail."

The American Numismatic Association is a congressionally chartered nonprofit educational organization dedicated to encouraging people to study and collect money and related items. The ANA helps its 28,000 members and the public discover and explore the world of money through its vast array of education and outreach programs, as well as its museum, library, publications, conventions and seminars. For more information, call 719-632-2646 or go to www.money.org.