

Ventura County

Business Support Services

Brown Mail & Printing Services

Background: The Grand Jury took notice of the fact that several Citizen complaint letters and some intra-County correspondence had been delivered to the Grand Jury Chambers with mailing dates that indicated inordinate handling delays.

Methodology: Grand Jury members inspected the County Business Support Services Division mailing and printing center and interviewed the Division Manager. They toured the facility and talked with several employees performing operations at the facility. The Grand Jury also mailed itself letters from various mailing facilities external from the County system and noted the processing time consumed in their delivery.

Findings:

- F-1. Some time ago (as a cost cutting effort) the County merged its printing operation with its mail handling operation. Both operations are housed at the County Services building.
- F-2. The mail handling system for intra-County mail and for incoming and outgoing mail external to the intra-County mail system is known as “brown mail” (brown mail).
- F-3. The printing system utilizes the latest in reproduction machines and is a very digitized operation. The whole system is highly automated.
- F-4. The printing operation utilizes digital format and can accommodate all forms of digital data (Word documents, email, hard copies through scanning, etc.). Records in digital form of what is printed for customers are kept in order to assist customers with formatting and other changes.
- F-5. County agencies are free to go to competing commercial providers for printing, reproduction and digital formatting services.
- F-6. The Business Support Services Division performs mass mailing and circular printing services on order.
- F-7. With respect to the two kinds of mail, intra-County mail and U.S. mail (incoming and outgoing), pickup and delivery are handled through a courier system with six (6) routes. Deliveries and pickups occur once or twice a day depending on the “contract” with the recipient of the service. The courier employees are full time County employees.

- F-8. With respect to intra-County mail, the mail is separated into “tubs” when brought in and then is placed in boxes labeled for each recipient client. The separated mail is then picked up by the couriers for their particular route and taken to the drop station. The mail goes in and out on a one-day basis and there is usually no backlog. However, on an unusually busy day, such as an occasional Monday, there might be a hold over of one day.
- F-9. Business Support Services personnel visually scan the floor every day to assure that no mail has fallen onto the floor.
- F-10. The same distribution system used for intra-County mail is used for incoming U.S. mail after the U.S. the mail is picked up by Business Support Services personnel at the U.S. Postal Service. Business Support Services does not wait for delivery of its mail by the U.S. Postal Service. The Postal Service has the County’s mail ready for pickup by 7:30 each morning.
- F-11. Collected outgoing U.S. mail is first sorted and then put through a metering machine that date stamps the mail, weighs it and assigns a stamp payment to it. Outsized (non-standard) envelopes and packages are weighed manually and are machine stamped.
- F-12. Due to high volume processing, brown mail items are occasionally erroneously processed as outgoing U.S. mail. This is apparently due to the item’s being packaged in standard white business envelopes.
- F-13. Outgoing U.S. mail is turned over to a contractor who bar codes each piece of mail (using specialized machinery and software) and then delivers it to the U.S. Postal Service.
- F-14. The outgoing U.S. mail is date stamped before it is given to the contractor. The U.S. Postal Service will not accept mail that is not postmarked the day it is received. To assure timely delivery the contractor makes three pickups each day.
- F-15. The use of bar coding by the contractor provides the County with a substantial reduction in the cost of the mailing.
- F-16. Last year over four million pieces of outgoing mail were processed. Incoming mail was not measured, but amounted to 10 to 15 “tubs” per day.
- F-17. Persons using County “location numbers” in mail addresses can obviate possible delays in mail delivery. This applies to both incoming U.S. mail and all intra-County mail.

Conclusions:

- C-1. The printing function of Business Support Services is well organized, well equipped and is competitive with the commercial market (F-1, F-3, F-4, F-5, F-6).
- C-2. The brown mail system is well organized and efficient in its distribution and collection functions (F-7, F-8, F-9).

- C-3. The collection, mailing and distribution of U.S. mail is performed with efficiency and at the lowest possible cost available (F-10, F-11, F-13, F-14, F-15).
- C-4. Occasional classification errors can be mitigated by periodic reminders to sorters of the most common pitfalls that may cause misclassification (F-12).
- C-5. The efficiency of the brown mail system could be further advanced by the inclusion of “location numbers” in addresses used by the County both for external and intra-County mail (F-16).
- C-6. The delays in mail delivery that instigated inquiry were anomalous and statistically insignificant.

Recommendation:

- R-1. The Business Support Services Division aggressively advertise to its customers the value to be had in revising all County return address references to include each unit’s “location number” (F-17).
- R-2. Business Support Services Division periodically remind mail sorters of the most common pitfalls that may cause misclassification (C-4).

Required Response:

Business Support Services Division (R-1, R-2).

Commendation:

The Business Support Services Division, the Facilities & Materials Department and the General Services Agency, their managers and employees are to be commended for the efficient and competent manner in which they handle an enormous and complicated mail system with a minimum of delay and disruption. The County should be proud of the professionalism displayed by this Division in the performance of its duties in connection with this essential service.