



THE FEDERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT AND SECURITY ARM OF THE U.S. POSTAL SERVICE

U.S. POSTAL INSPECTION SERVICE

FAQs

1. What are Postal Inspectors?

Postal Inspectors are federal law enforcement agents responsible for enforcing more than 200 federal statutes involving crimes against the United States Postal Service, the U.S. Mail and its customers.

2. What are the responsibilities of the Postal Inspection Service?

The Postal Inspection Service is responsible for protecting postal employees and the mails; enforcing postal laws; ensuring plant and personnel security; conducting various internal audits within the Postal Service; and conducting criminal investigations and presenting evidence to U.S. Attorneys and other prosecutors on these investigations.

3. What authority do Postal Inspectors have under the law?

As sworn federal law enforcement agents, Postal Inspectors have the power to serve warrants and subpoenas issued under the authority of the United States; make arrests without warrants for postal-related offenses committed in their presence; make arrests without warrants for postal-related felonies cognizable under the laws of the United States, if they have reasonable grounds to believe that the person arrested has committed or is committing such a felony; carry firearms, and make seizures of property as provided by law.

4. Can Postal Inspectors open mail if they feel it may contain something illegal?

First-Class letters and parcels are protected against search and seizure under the Fourth Amendment to the Constitution, and, as such, cannot be opened without a search warrant. If there is probable cause to believe the contents of a First-Class letter or parcel violate federal law, Postal Inspectors can obtain a search warrant to open the mail piece. Other classes of mail do not contain private correspondence and therefore may be opened without a warrant.

5. Why do Postal Inspectors frequently conduct joint investigations with other agencies?

Overlapping jurisdiction often requires collaboration with other federal, state and local authorities. Postal Inspectors have developed close working relationships with other agencies that facilitate such cooperation.

6. Do Postal Inspectors get involved in investigations unrelated to mail or the Postal Service?

On rare occasions, Postal Inspectors are asked by the U.S. Department of Justice or a U.S. Attorney to assist in an investigation that does not involve the use of the mails. But typically, investigations will relate to the Postal Service or the U.S. Mail in some way. For example, securities or insurance fraud may involve sending false statements or claims through the mail. Child molesters may be producing child pornography and distributing it via the U.S. Mail. These types of crimes violate statutes that are within the jurisdiction of the Postal Inspection Service.

7. Who is in charge of the Postal Inspection Service?

The Chief Postal Inspector heads the Postal Inspection Service. The Chief Postal Inspector acts as security officer and defense coordinator for the Postal Service and maintains liaison with other investigative and law enforcement agencies of the federal government.

8. Who appoints the Chief Postal Inspector?

The Postmaster General of the United States.

9. Who does the Chief Postal Inspector report to?

The Chief Postal Inspector reports to the Postmaster General of the United States.