

# POSTAL NEWS

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## **1. Haiti mail being held by US Postal Service**

The Associated Press

Friday, January 15, 2010; 5:11 PM

WASHINGTON -- The U.S. Postal Service said Friday it is holding mail destined for Haiti.

Portions of Haiti have been devastated by an earthquake and the post office said the mail hold was imposed because of disruptions to normal flight operations by airlines.

Officials said mail addressed to Haiti will still be accepted, but will be held until transportation arrangements become available.

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Posted: 8:05 PM Jan 15, 2010

## **2. USPS Suspends Mail Service To Haiti**

With air service on hold, the U.S. Postal Service has suspended mail service to Haiti.

(WIBW) - The U.S. Postal Service announced Friday it has placed a temporary hold on all mail destined to Haiti.

The action comes in response to the cancellation of normal flight operations by air cargo contractors into and out of the island nation, where emergency relief efforts are continuing as a result of a devastating earthquake on Jan. 12.

Mail addressed to Haiti is continuing to be accepted by the Postal Service. It will be held until transportation arrangements become available.

Additional information regarding acceptance and movement of mail to Haiti will be provided as it becomes available. Updates are posted online at <http://www.usps.com/international/serviceupdates.htm#H17>

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### **3. Higher airline baggage fees create opportunity for luggage shippers**

By Hugo Martín

January 16, 2010

The announcements this week that three of the country's largest airlines are again increasing baggage fees came as bad news for airline passengers, who must already pay for such extras as blankets, pillows and snacks.

But the higher fees are good news to Zeke Adkins, co-founder of Luggage Forward, a Boston business that ships luggage door-to-door for travelers who want to avoid the hassles of checking bags at the airport.

"Every time the airlines increase their fees, it translates into increased bookings for us," he said.

He is not alone in seeing the higher airline fees as an opportunity.

United Parcel Service Inc., FedEx Corp. and the U.S. Postal Service have all encouraged airline passengers to ship their luggage instead of hauling it through a crowded airport.

And if the airlines continue to raise fees, the shipping companies see a chance for more business in the future.

"We certainly welcome any additional service that may come as a result" of the higher fees, Postal Service spokesman David Lewin said.

Continental, Delta and United announced new rates this week for checking the first and second pieces of luggage on domestic flights.

Continental and Delta both raised fees by \$8 for the first bag and \$7 for the second suitcase. The increase went into effect for Continental passengers for flights on or after today. For Delta, the new prices took effect for flights after Tuesday.

The increase at both airlines brings the fee to \$25 for the first bag and \$35 for the second bag if passengers pay at the airport. The airlines offer a discount on the baggage fee if passengers pay online.

United increased the fees by \$5 a bag for passengers who bought tickets on or after Thursday for travel on or after Jan. 21. The fees are \$25 for the first bag and \$35 for the second, with discounts for paying online.

Since the airlines began increasing baggage fees in 2008, the charges have become a big source of revenue.

In the third quarter of 2009, the 10 largest U.S. carriers collected about \$740 million in baggage fees, more than double the \$350 million in fees they collected in the third quarter of 2008, according to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics.

UPS, FedEx and the Postal Service couldn't say how many more people were shipping luggage as a result of the higher airline fees.

But in the last year, UPS has noticed that more customers are shipping oversized packages, such as skis and golf clubs -- the kind of packages that would result in hefty airline baggage fees.

"We know anecdotally that we've seen an increase in business since the late summer of 2008," UPS spokeswoman Susan Rosenberg said.

In most cases, it's still cheaper to transport your luggage via the airlines than to ship it. For example, it would cost about \$240 to ship a standard suitcase weighing about 50 pounds for a trip from Pasadena to San Jose by overnight delivery with Luggage Forward. That's for a round trip, with pickup at your house before the trip begins and delivery back home afterward.

To ship the same package overnight via FedEx costs less -- about \$210 -- but you may have to ship the package from a FedEx office.

In contrast, Continental, Delta and United will charge you \$50 for the first bag on a round trip.

But you can reduce the shipping cost if you send your package several days before your trip and give the shipping company a few extra days to deliver the package after you return. You can also save money by shipping only your clothes and toiletries without a suitcase, thus reducing the weight of the package.

And by shipping your luggage, you also skip the baggage-check lines at the airport. Airline passengers who travel without luggage save an average of two hours a trip compared with passengers who check luggage, Adkins said.

However, he couldn't calculate how much aggravation you save by going through an airport sans baggage.

DOT steps up aid to frustrated fliers

The Department of Transportation has made it clear recently that the federal agency is increasingly allied with frustrated passengers against big airlines.

For example:

\* On Friday, the department issued a \$30,000 fine against United Airlines for failing to disclose the full price for airfares, as required by department rules. For several days, United failed to include a 7.5% federal excise tax in the advertised price that passengers must pay for airline tickets, according to the agency.

\* Earlier in the week, the agency unveiled a website ([airconsumer.dot.gov](http://airconsumer.dot.gov)) that makes it easier for passengers to file complaints about airline service and keep track of the rates for on-time arrivals and lost baggage.

\* Last month, the department announced it would fine airlines that leave passengers stranded on a plane on the tarmac for more than three hours without allowing the passengers to return to the gate. The new restrictions also require the airlines to offer food, water and access to bathrooms within two hours of a delay. Airlines that fail to comply can be fined up to \$27,500 per passenger. The new regulations take effect in April.

\* In November, the department issued fines totaling \$175,000 against Continental, ExpressJet and Mesaba airlines for their involvement in an incident that left 47 passengers stranded in a plane in Rochester, Minn., for nearly six hours.

The new Transportation Department website simplifies information, online forms and links that help passengers file complaints or keep track of the airlines with the worst on-time rates, among other information.

"This makes it more user friendly so people can get to things more quickly," said Bill Mosley, a department spokesman.

The website offers a link to an online complaint form that is routed to the Transportation Department's Aviation Consumer Protection Division, which keeps track of the complaints and compiles a monthly report. The department also reviews the complaints and investigates those that allege violation of aviation safety rules, deceptive advertising or discrimination against passengers based on religion, race or disabilities, Mosley said.

Asked about the new Transportation Department website, David Castelveter, a spokesman for the Air Transport Assn., a trade group that represents the nation's airlines, responded that carriers "constantly strive to better serve their customers and they welcome customer opinions."

The website won praise from the National Business Travel Assn., an organization that represents more than 5,000 corporate and government travel managers.

Said association President Michael W. McCormick: "We are hopeful this new website will help travelers report airline service problems, allowing the Department of Transportation to address and resolve them quickly and effectively."

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#### **4. What's wrong with Post Office**

James Bertolone – Guest essayist  
Essays – January 16, 2010 - 5:00am

James Bertolone

In the last several months, we have seen press accounts of lost political mailings, delayed mail, reduced window hours and attempts to close hundreds of postal stations nationwide.

Obviously the Great Recession that began in 2007 has taken its toll on postal revenues, but there is much more to the story.

The conventional wisdom that the Internet and e-mail, like the telegraph and telephone over a century ago, are the demise of the U.S. Postal Service, is simply untrue.

Mail sent from one household to another is less than 3 percent of our volume. We are part of the business economy doing business mail, advertising and shipping. The Internet and advertising mail generate shipping for UPS and FedEx as well as the Postal Service.

In 2006, well after Americans began using the Internet and e-mail on a mass scale, mail volume reached an all-time high of 213 billion pieces, and yet we needed a rate increase in the spring of 2007.

President George Bush's appointed Postal Board of Governors and Postmaster General, John Potter, pushed for postal reform from 2001-06 when it was enacted. This required transferring an average of \$5.5 billion a year for 10 years into the future retirees health benefits fund, to make government deficits appear smaller, as the Government Accounting Office says this account is currently overfunded by \$13 billion.

The public and small businesses are also subsidizing large corporate and financial mailers with sorting discounts averaging over 10 cents per piece. Postal employees do this same sort on automation for two cents a piece. This giveaway of postal revenue at your expense costs the Postal Service \$6 billion to \$8 billion a year in revenue.

After downsizing 140,000 jobs in four years, the Postal Service has about 533,000 union-represented workers and 66,000 non-bargaining employees, mostly executives and management. This is one boss to eight employees.

When you hear labor costs are 80 percent of the postal dollar, remember close to 25 percent of the postal dollar goes to those who do not transport, sort or deliver the mail, and do not serve at public windows or maintain the buildings and equipment.

We should require Congress to perform its oversight function, starting with demanding the resignations of Potter and Bush-appointed members of the Postal Board of Governors before they destroy the greatest postal service with the lowest rates in the western world. Mailing services constitute 9 percent of our economy. The Postal Service belongs to every American.

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