

USPS EXPANDS MAIL-SORTING TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE SERVICE, REDUCE COSTS

Automation revolutionized the way the Postal Service processed letter mail. Delivery Point Sequencing took it a step further — placing letter mail in the order of delivery. Now, that same kind of technology will be applied to sorting flats — large envelopes, magazines, Known as the Flats Sequencing system (FSS) program, the initiative approved by the Postal Service Board of Governors allows the agency to move forward with plans to employ sophisticated equipment to sort flat-mail pieces for letter carriers, who now must manually sequence this mail before leaving the office for their routes.

"Using technology to sort flat mail into the order of delivery for letter carriers will increase efficiency in the office and allow carriers to begin delivering to their customers earlier in the day," said Walt O'Tormey, vice president of Engineering for the Postal Service. "The Postal Service experienced significant benefits in the 1990s by automating the processing and sequencing of letter mail, and we hope to extend these improvements to processing flats."

The FSS equipment is designed to sequence flat mail at a rate of approximately 16,500 pieces per hour. Scheduled to operate 17 hours a day, each machine will be capable of sequencing 280,500 pieces a day to more than 125,000 delivery addresses.

Phase I of the program calls for an initial order of 100 FSS machines to be deployed to 33 postal facilities beginning in the summer of 2008.

A prototype FSS was installed last year at the Indianapolis, IN, Mail Processing Annex, where it was tested sorting mail in delivery sequence for carriers in that area. A full-size pre-production machine will be installed at the Dulles, VA, mail processing facility, where it will operate six days a week for one year (August 2007 to July 2008).

As this test proceeds, the Postal Service will study and measure the system's effect on downstream transportation, logistics, work methods and other long lead-time activities required to support deployment in 2008.

"Delivery remains our largest cost, accounting for 43 percent of all expenses," said O'Tormey. "That, combined with costs to serve almost 2 million new addresses each year, means we must pursue every opportunity to improve our efficiency and the service we provide to customers." □ *Source: MailPro Jan/Feb 2007*



