



Original Version: December, 2003

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Junk Mail

Introduction

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Introduction

Each year it seems that our mailboxes are filled with an ever increasing amount of solicitation mail. Much of this mail is unwanted and unappreciated, and has become known by universal catch-all name "junk mail." Over the years, the companies that market through direct mail solicitation have responded to the cries of consumers who simply do not want to receive unsolicited junk mail. Many companies have established policies and procedures for consumers to follow that will discontinue sending unwanted mail to those who express a desire to have it stopped.

Colorado Recycles is interested in reducing the amount of unwanted mail solicitations not only because we feel the same frustrations as any other mail recipients. We are concerned that the large amount of unwanted mail ends up unopened in the waste stream and then into landfills. Some national organizations have estimated that the average American receives approximately 40 pounds of junk mail per year. This translates into millions of pounds of unwanted paper going into landfills and taking up valuable space.

Junk mail is not always easy to recycle because many of the inks are particularly difficult to deal with. However, we currently have 15 recycling resources listed in our Recycling Guide. Some of these resources, such as the Direct Marketing Association, are not recyclers per se but are trade associations or other industry specific groups that do have some valuable tips for consumers. It is the belief of Colorado Recycles that if unwanted mail solicitations are never received in the mailbox, then they won't end up in the trash and in the landfills.

It is unrealistic to think that all junk mail can be stopped, and that none will ever again reach our mailboxes. But, the amount of junk mail can be decreased if the consumer will take a few moments to contact the companies, organizations and trade associations to ask that their name and address be removed from the mailing lists.

Stopping Junk Mail Before It Gets To You

One of the largest of the trade associations that represents the interests of the mail solicitors is The Direct Marketing Association. The DMA provides information for consumers that help them get off mailing lists. This information can be found on the DMA website at www.the-dma.org. From the DMA home page, simply click on the menu button "For Consumers." That page of the DMA website not only has information for removing your name and address from mailing lists but there is also an online form that can be completed to accomplish the notification.

Many companies that have long established business relationships with consumers have also become very sensitive to the desire to not receive unsolicited mail solicitations. These companies usually have a way for the consumer to either decline mail solicitations or a way to only accept mail solicitations and information for particular products or services.

Much of the debate over direct marketing has shifted from mail solicitation to email solicitations called "spam." The Direct Marketing Association also has information about how to minimize the receipt of email spam solicitations, and that information can be found on the same page as the junk mail information.

A useful background fact sheet on how addresses get captured by the direct mail marketers has been produced by the Privacy Rights Clearinghouse located in San Diego, California. The fact sheet is available on the Clearinghouse's website at www.privacyrights.org.

Other Simple Steps That Can Be Taken

If the options that are provided by the Direct Marketing Association are insufficient, there are several steps that consumers can take to get off the mailing lists:

Go to the US Post Office: Most junk mail is sent through the US Postal Service as 3rd class mail. Being low on the priority list of mail, the consumer cannot simply write "Return to sender" across the article and send it back. The Postal Service will end up throwing it away just as the recipient would have, and that does not help divert the junk mail away from the waste stream.

However, the Postal Service does have a form that can be invaluable. It is form 1500, and it was originally intended to block the receipt of unwanted pornographic materials. Many people have reported that due to a ruling of the US Supreme Court in 1970 that the form can be used to stop any unwanted mail. We reviewed the form, which can be found by following this link to a PDF version of Form 1500: http://www.usps.com/forms/_pdf/ps1500.pdf . The instructions for the form are specific to unwanted pornographic material, but do not indicate that it can be used to stop other types of mail. It is our recommendation that you contact your local postmaster for the most current and accurate information on the use of this form.

Avoid Getting On Lists: Avoid getting on even more mailing lists by taking care whenever you submit your name and address to anyone. If you're filling out a form such as a warranty, subscription, raffle, customer info card, credit card application, membership for an organization, etc. add the phrase, "please do not rent, sell, or trade my name or address" next to the other information you provide. If you are concerned that the manufacturer will not honor any warranties if you take this step, you can contact the consumer affairs division of the Colorado Attorney General's office at <http://www.ago.state.co.us/> .

Most junk mail pieces have a toll free “800” number somewhere on the solicitation piece that you can use to notify the sender that you wish to be removed from the mailing list. You will need to have the mailing label handy when you contact them since that is the information that they need to delete you from the list. You should not be concerned that you will offend the sender. Most businesses and organizations only want to send solicitations to potential buyers, and if you are not going to be a customer then they can save money by not contacting you. However, many businesses will automatically put you on a mailing list if you have purchased something through their catalogs or other solicitations. Sometimes these businesses or organizations will sell, lease or share their mailing lists with other businesses or organizations. By contacting the sender, you reduce the likelihood that your name and address will distribute.

Remember, the best way to avoid having junk mail end up in landfills is to stop its delivery before it ever gets to your mailbox and trash can.