

**Forest Service Handbook
National Headquarters - Washington Office
Washington, DC**

**Forest Service Handbook 6209.12 – Correspondence Handbook
Chapter 50 - Preparation and Filing Correspondence**

Amendment: 6209.12-2014-1

Effective date: September 02, 2014

Duration: This amendment is effective until superseded or removed.

Approved by: J. Lenise Lago, Deputy Chief for Business Operations

Date approved: August 27, 2014

Responsible Staff:

Last Change: 6209.12-2007-1 to chapter 30

Superseded Document(s): Entire Handbook including title page; 6209.12_contents, Amendment 6209.12-2005-7, October 14, 2005; 00--2 thru 03, FSH June 1988 Amend 6, 6209.12_10, Amendment 6209.12-2005-1, October 03, 2005; 6209.12_20, Amendment 6209.12-2005-2, October 03, 2005; 6209.12_30, Amendment 6209.12-2007-1, December 19, 2007; 6209.12_40, Amendment 6209.12-2005-4, October 06, 2005; 6209.12_50, Amendment 6209.12-2005-5, October 07, 2005; 6209.12_60, Amendment 6209.12-2005-6, October 14, 2005

Digest: Following is an explanation of the changes throughout the directive by section.

6209.12: Revises entire handbook with extensive edits throughout.

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50.2 - Objectives

To provide a consistent process for mailing and storing correspondence related to United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service programs and activities.

51 - Preparing Correspondence for Mailing

51.1 - Paper Copy Mail

This section provides instructions on transmitting paper copy correspondence by postal mail. These instructions do not apply to the mailing of correspondence electronically.

51.11 - Standard Mailing Instructions

1. Formal and informal letters are printed single-sided only; do not print double-sided. Attachments and enclosures are also printed single-sided.
2. Type the address in block style in the middle of the envelope.
3. The first letter of each word should be capitalized.
4. The address must include name, street address or post office box, city, State abbreviation, and zip code.
5. Use the standard two-letter abbreviation for all States, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, or the Virgin Islands, with one space after the comma between city and State.
6. The zip code follows two spaces after the two-letter State abbreviation.
7. If in addition to the formal addressee (such as a Member of Congress) there is a person to whom the letter needs to be directed (such as a staff member), add an “ATTN:” line between the organization name and the street address.

The Honorable John Doe
U.S. House of Representatives
ATTN: Timmy McStaffer
123 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

51.12 - Special Mailing Instructions

If using certified mail, express mail, priority mail, or an authorized commercial carrier such as UPS or FedEx, follow relevant guidelines.

51.13 - Cost-Effective Mailing Procedures

Whenever possible, transmit paper copy correspondence by the most efficient, cost effective method.

Upon request, the Postal Service will provide a postal rate and classification schedule. The rate information and the envelope and package sizes are listed in U.S. Postal Service Notice 123, or online at <http://www.usps.com/prices/>. An update is published each time there is a change in the first class mail rate.

51.14 - Return Receipt

Avoid the routine use of return receipts.

51.15 - Envelopes

1. Only use U.S. Government envelopes and postage for Government mail.
2. Only approved Smokey Bear and Woodsy Owl logos may be used on Government envelopes.
3. Letter-size envelopes and cards must conform to the following dimensions:

Height: 3 1/2" to 6 1/8"
Length: 5" to 11 1/2"
Thickness: 7/1000" to 1/4"

The maximum weight for a letter-size envelope is 3.5 ounces.

Large-size envelopes may also be used, up to 12" (height) by 15" (length) by 3/4" (thickness).

51.2 - Sending an Email Response

The following instructions apply to email correspondence of a more formal nature, particularly emails that take the place of paper correspondence. Such emails may include responses from Agency officials to Members of Congress, high-level government officials, high-level officials of non-governmental organizations, or members of the public, particularly on controversial or high profile issues. The following instructions are not intended to apply to all ordinary, day-to-day, work-related emails.

1. You may want to send an email response from a corporate (that is, staff) email address, not from an individual employee's Forest Service email account.

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2. A cc or bcc copy should also be sent to relevant staff or offices, as appropriate.
3. The subject heading of the email should be informative and professional. A generic subject heading such as “USDA Forest Service response” may be used if necessary, but something more specific is preferable.
4. A copy of the response should be filed in the appropriate format (hard copy or electronic). (For more information, see section 52).
5. When sending electronic official correspondence to other Forest Service offices, send it to “mail rooms,” not to an individual or staff’s email address.

52 - Preparing Correspondence for Filing

This section provides instructions on filing hard copy and electronic correspondence.

To provide uniformity throughout the Forest Service, comply with the standards in FSM 6230, Records Creation, Maintenance, and Disposition, and FSH 6209.11, Records Management Handbook.

52.1 - Filing Paper and Electronic Records

1. If the official record copy is maintained in paper, then the record consists of a hard copy of the final signed correspondence and the document summary (metadata) from the electronic correspondence management system.
2. If the official record copy is maintained in the electronic correspondence management system, then the electronic copy is the official record, and no paper copy is needed.
3. While transitioning from paper (hard copy) to electronic records, the records custodians will maintain an identical set of paper and electronic records for 12 months after implementation of electronic records management for the subject records.

52.2 - File Codes

1. The appropriate file code category should have been included in the document. File code categories correspond to a subject or staff and indicate filing instructions and records retention schedule. See FSH 6209.11 for more information.
2. Official copies of correspondence should be filed according to file code category.

52.3 - Filing and Tracking Unsigned Letters

1. An unsigned letter should be prepared as a draft using the official Forest Service electronic correspondence management system. Until the letter is signed and released for mailing, it should be stored in the system's drafts folder for easy retrieval and tracking.
2. If privacy or confidentiality concerns prevent a letter's inclusion in the electronic correspondence management system, it should be stored in an alternate secure location where it can be retrieved and tracked by appropriate personnel.

52.4 - Filing the Incoming Record

A copy of the incoming correspondence should also be filed with the official copy of the outgoing response. This ensures that tracking will be possible, in the event that questions later arise about the incoming letter.

52.5 - Correspondence That Must Be Controlled

Correspondence received from Members of Congress must be controlled, even if it was answered at the local level. Other correspondence may be controlled at the discretion of the Regions or other local staff.

Prior to filing, remember to forward copies of the incoming and outgoing letters to the ORMS correspondence team, if this has not yet been done. The ORMS correspondence team will assign a control number and enter the material in the electronic correspondence management system. This will allow the material to be tracked and identified later, if a need arises, such as a follow-up question or more correspondence on the same subject.