



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
December 18, 2003

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Release No. 102

## **BARCODE ACCURACY IN LARGE MAILINGS TO BE TESTED**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The U.S. Postal Service will begin checking the accuracy of barcodes on high volume mailings beginning January 1. By verifying that such mailings are eligible for automation rates, the organization can make certain that the high quality of mail accepted at discount postage rates is maintained.

MERLIN (Mail Evaluation Readability Lookup INSTRument) is the equipment used to verify bulk mailings at Postal Service mail acceptance units. The equipment performs a variety of checks on samples of large mailings to make certain they meet required preparation standards. First deployed in 2001, the equipment had only been used to verify that barcodes were readable by automated sorting equipment. With the start of the new year and the final installation of more than 1,200 units, it will also check for blatant ZIP Code errors as represented in the barcode.

MERLIN will begin to detect such errors as ZIP Codes with 0000 or 9999 in the ZIP+4 portion of the mailing address. It will also identify sequential strings of numbers in the last six digits of the ZIP Code which would indicate an address programming error. Mailings with an error rate of more than one percent will not be eligible for automation discounts.

The analysis of barcode digit strings is the first of a phased-in strategy to improve address accuracy. MERLIN will sample all mailings of letters or oversized envelopes that total more than 10,000 pieces and about one in every six mailings less than 10,000 pieces.

“Using MERLIN to verify address accuracy will benefit both the Postal Service and our customers by helping to eliminate incorrect addresses that are both costly and inefficient,” said John Sadler, the Postal Service’s manager of business mail acceptance.

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