SSSMC - The 2nd Conversion

On October 19, 2012, the above advertising card was first seen attached to a "***Self-Service Ship And Mail Center***" [SSSMC] at the Plano post office at Zip Code 75074. These kiosks are also referred to as "***Automated Postal Centers***" [APC].

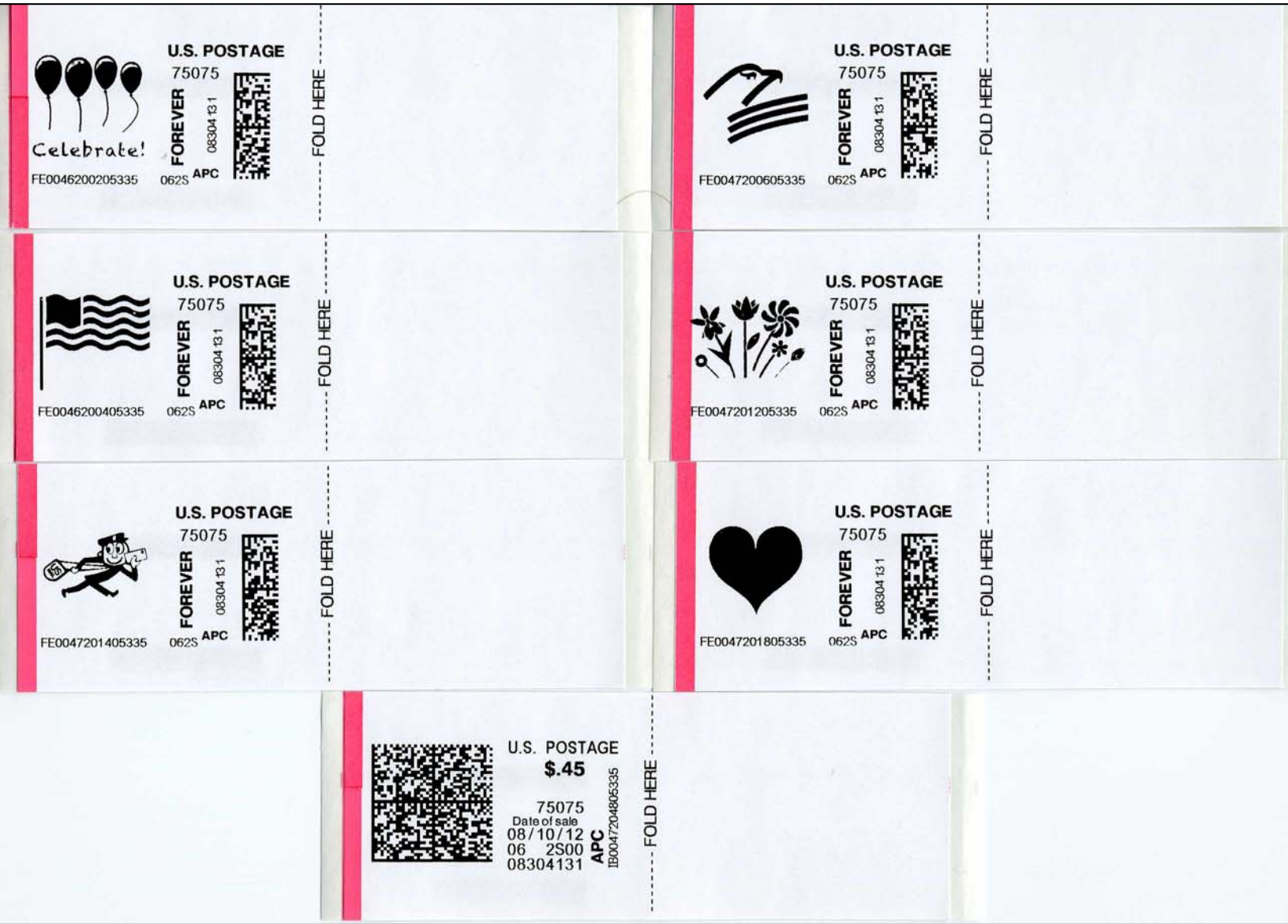
The card advertised what appeared to be a color APC "FOREVER" postage label with a Holiday Mailbox motif that would presumably be available soon. At that time though, only black & white FOREVER postage labels were available, in 6 user-selectable designs.

The first APC conversion, from plain barcode design labels to the FOREVER black & white design labels had taken place nationwide between April 12 and October 31, 2012. Here then is the story of the 2nd (and short-lived; 60-day) conversion - to color labels, starting November 11, 2012.

Exhibit Index

Forerunners

The immediate forerunners to the color Holiday Mailbox labels were 6 different designs of black & white user-selectable images & a barcode design, normal above or in fail-over mode below.



The new color Holiday Mailbox Label

First day of sale of color mailbox label at Zip Code 75023 on November 14 2012
(Date code 431)

The new color holiday “mailbox” design replaces the 6 black & white designs previously available.

As with the previous black & white designs, stamps could be purchased in strips of 1 stamp + 1 VOID label up to full sheets of 10 (with a maximum of 100 stamps [as 10 sheets of 10 stamps each] at a time)..

To accomplish the conversion of the black & white to the color design:
1) The new pre-printed color labels had to be inserted in the printer.
2) The kiosk had to be put into the “holiday label” mode. This then replaces the choices for the 6 black & white designs with just the color label as the only option.

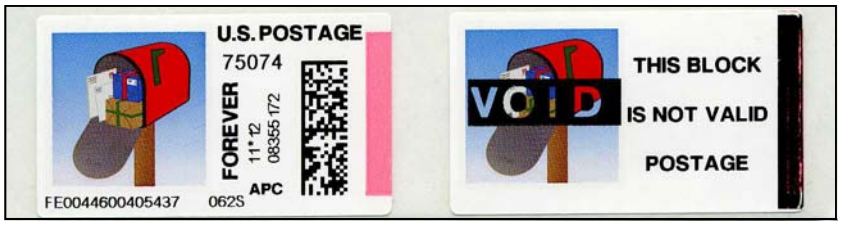
Doing just 1) but not 2), or 2) but not 1) above results in errors (later in this exhibit!).

The labels themselves come in boxes of 13,000 labels, arranged in a Z-Fold pattern of 2 sheets of 10, with serrations at every sheet of 10.

Box labels are torn when the plastic wrap around the labels is removed by USPS personnel

The changes

New color mailbox holiday Label



November 20, 2012 (date code 437) 1st day of color label at Zip Code 75074 (Plano, TX)

Old Black & White Label

April 18, 2012 (date code 221) Early black & white design (from one of the first ten pilot post offices).

The differences between the old black & white designs and the new color mailbox label are:

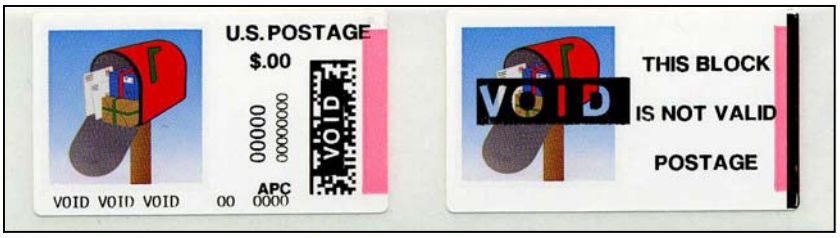
1. The color design is pre-printed on the thermal label stock, versus the black & white designs which were printed on-demand.
2. There is a clear overprint coating covering the color mailbox design.

Clear coat overprint on color mailbox label from 1st day of availability at Zip Code 75023 (November 14, 2012).

3. The Month & Year sold date are now printed vertically in “MM*YY” format to the right of the word FOREVER.
4. The NOT VALID FOR POSTAGE label has been redesigned with an extra block of “VOID” that is placed such as to cover the mailbox design if the paper is adjusted properly in the printer. As a result, the rest of the text is slightly smaller and placed to the right.

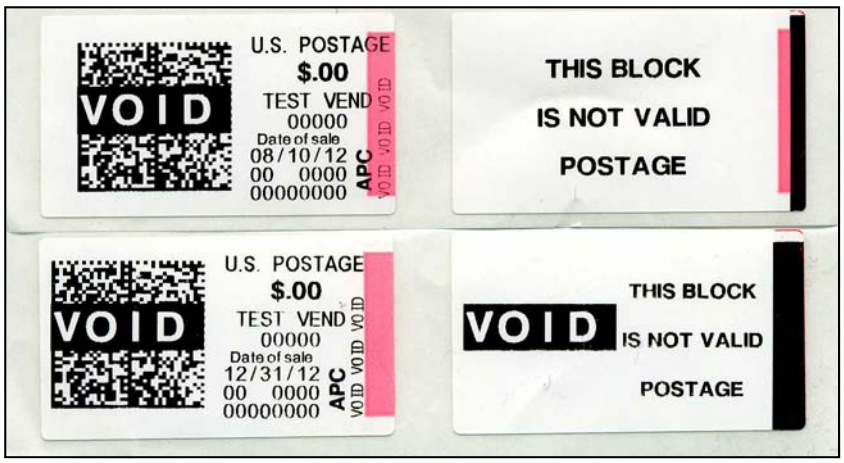
Not all kiosks were converted at the same time. Post Offices were notified in early/mid-November, with conversions to the color labels generally starting on November 13, 2012, the day after Columbus Day. All kiosks were converted before the Thanksgiving weekend (November 22-25, 2012), the label at the top being done just 2 days prior!

Test Labels



As a result of the design change to the color label, the resulting “Test” labels also changed:

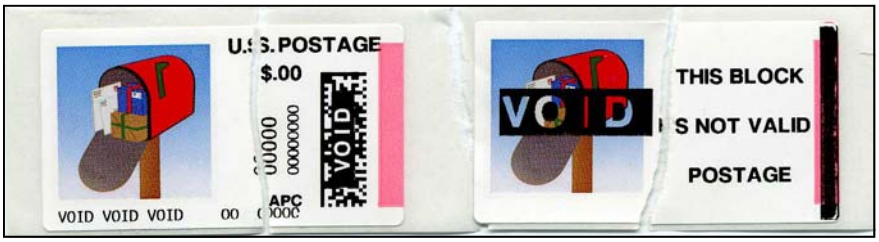
1) Smaller barcode matrix design (and now on the right).
2) Large “VOID” in a rectangle to obscure the mailbox design.
3) Text elements and positions changed to correspond to the color label design.



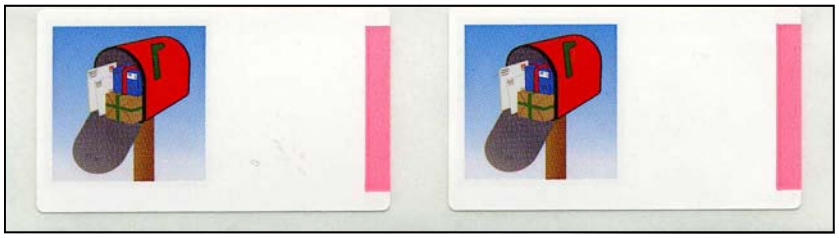
Black & White VOID label prior to the color mailbox design conversion.

Black & White VOID label after the color mailbox design conversion.

After the initial switch to the mailbox design, when kiosks reverted back to the black & white designs, the resulting test prints retain the new look.



USPS personnel are supposed to destroy test prints before discarding them.



Occasionally, unprinted labels could be found near the kiosks.

The Black & White Fail-Over

Above:
The large printer at this kiosk failed shortly after printing these 3 (of 6) designs.

Right:
The “large” barcode matrix labels themselves were NOT affected by the switch of the small labels from the 6 black & white designs to the color holiday mailbox design.

Due to the color portion of the mailbox label being pre-printed, all other small labels (with the large barcode matrix) are now printed on the “large” label printer (which has the pink facing stripe on the left).

When the color mailbox label printer experienced a problem, the kiosk would automatically switch to the 6 black & white design mode and prints those label on the large printer as the “Fold-Here” fail-over variety!

Left:
Three Forever Fold-Here labels from a kiosk which experienced a malfunction with the color mailbox labels and switched automatically to the black & designs!

Varieties - “Shifted Printing”, “Small Font” & “Small Void”

Independence, Missouri
Zip Code 64119

An nice example of an extreme shift in the centering of the paper in the printer

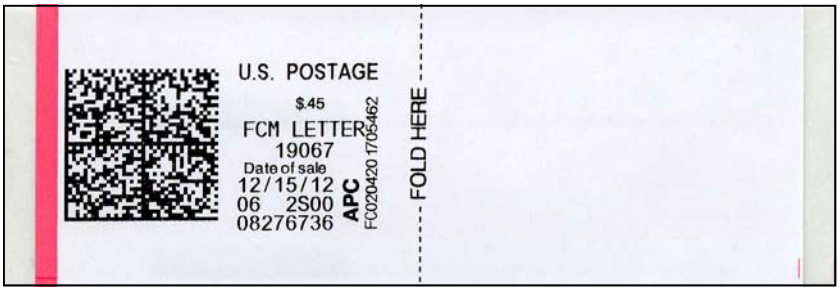
While it would appear that the printing is too far to the right, since the print head is stationary, it is the paper that is actually positioned too far to the left by approximately 1/4” in the printer, causing the letter “E” in POSTAGE to not print.

Fort Mitchell / Edgewood, Kentucky
Zip Code 41017

The only known APC that was printing a “small” VOID label.

Dates of use were are at least November 14, 2012 (code 431) to December 25, 2012 (code 472)

An unknown anomaly in the programming must be causing this kiosk to print the VOID and the “45c” (on the label to the right from 19067) in a much smaller font, but not affecting the rest of the label.

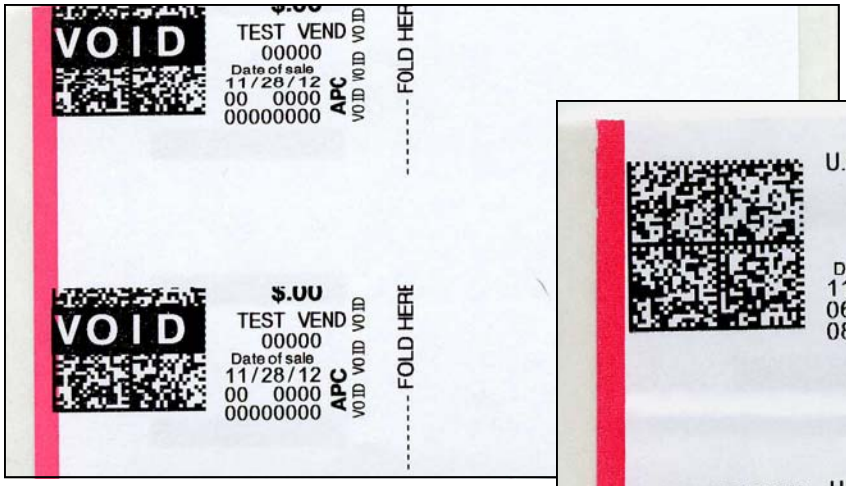


Errors - “Uncut Pairs”

The color mailbox labels cause ALL other small labels to now print on the large label printer as “FOLD HERE” versions.

Unfortunately, some of the printers developed paper feeding issues, causing the printer to skip printing the top part of the design (the word “US POSTAGE is missing) and to not cut the label after printing.

If a kiosk senses a printing issue, it prints a “duplicate” of the postage label. When scrutinized closely, the barcode matrix on the upper (reprint) label is IDENTICAL to the lower misprinted label!).



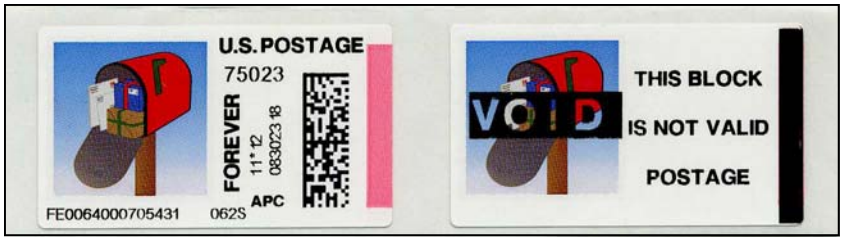
Above:
A miscut VOID test label should have alerted the USPS personnel that there was a problem.

Right:
An uncut strip of 3 different labels (the 2x 45¢ ARE different in this case, note the different sequence numbers 805 & 905!) from Tucson, Arizona (Zip Code 85715.

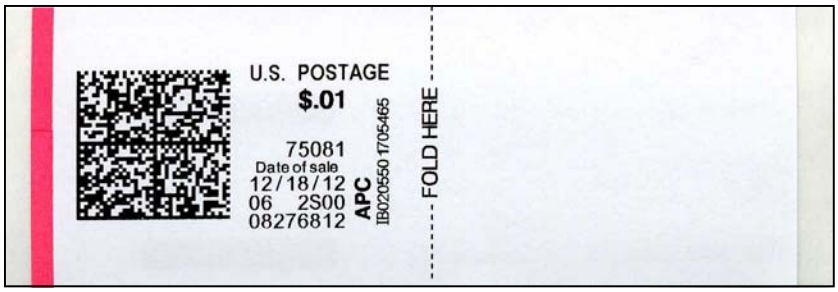
Errors - “Blank Design”

November 13, 2012 (1 day after Columbus Day, date code 430) was generally the first date that some of the kiosks were converted to the color Holiday Mailbox mode.

The kiosk at the Wildcat Station in Plano, Texas (Zip Code 75023) had been “converted” to the color label mode, but personnel did NOT put in the color mailbox labels, thus causing the printer to print the labels as designed (with NO design, since the color design was pre-printed on the label).
The problem was fixed the next day (date code 431)

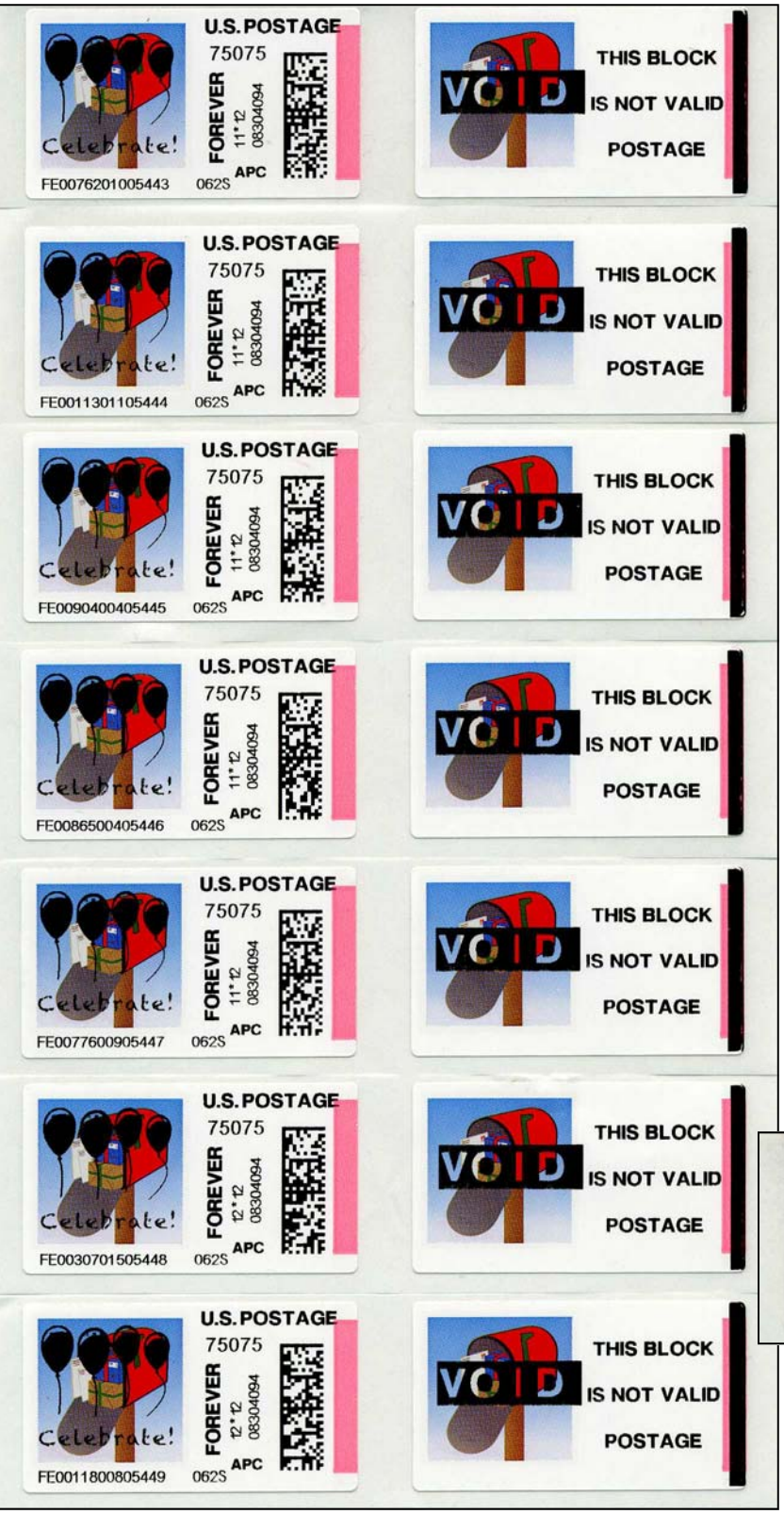


On December 18, 2012, it was discovered in Richardson, Texas (Zip Code 75081) that personnel had run out of color mailbox labels and put in the standard labels. The problem was resolved on the next day.



Proof that the kiosk at Zip Code 75081 was in the color “Holiday” label mode on that day is that the resulting barcode matrix designs are printed as FOLD HERE versions.

Errors - “Black & White design overprint on color label”

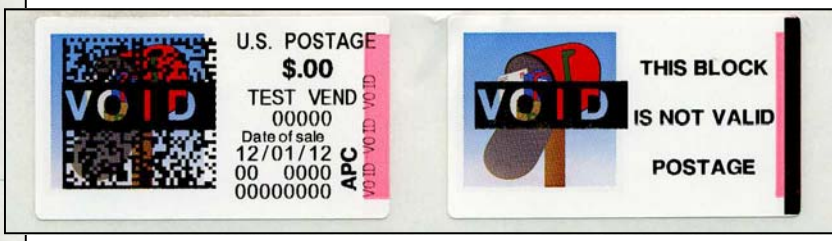


When the kiosk is left in the “standard” label mode, it prints the 6 different black & white designs.

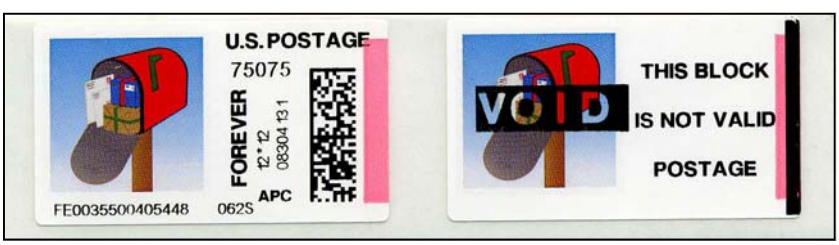
If USPS personnel leave the printer in the standard mode, but put in the color mailbox labels, then the resulting errors are black & white designs printed on top of the color mailbox design.

Usually this error was fixed fairly quickly. But in some cases, USPS personnel simply did not seem to care that incorrect labels were being printed, or even thought (incorrectly) that the kiosk can “sense” the type of label that was present and adjust itself.

On the left are examples of 7 consecutive days (date codes 443 to 449, November 26 to December 2, 2012) that these error labels were available at APC kiosk #1 at the Coit Road Station in Plano, Texas (Zip Code 75075).

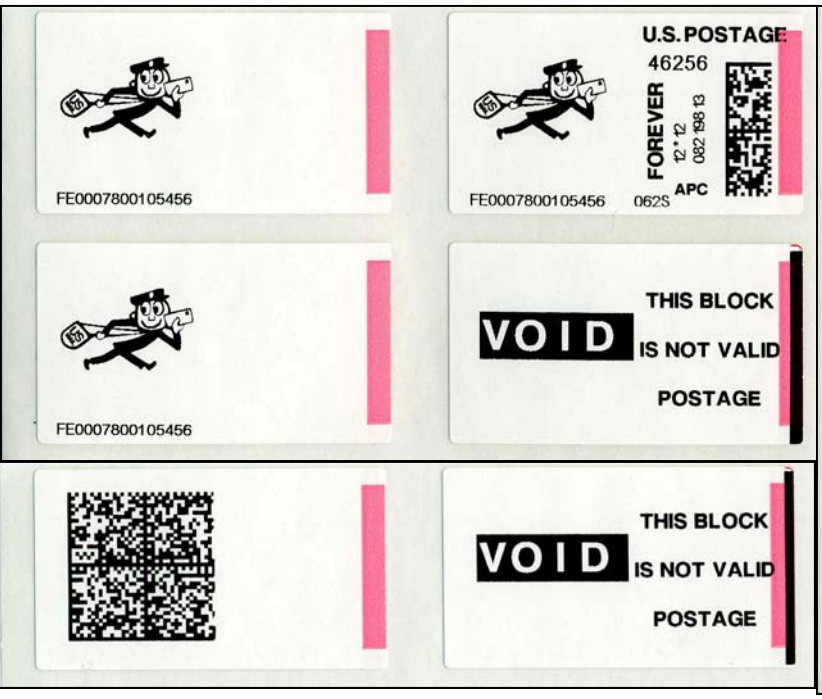


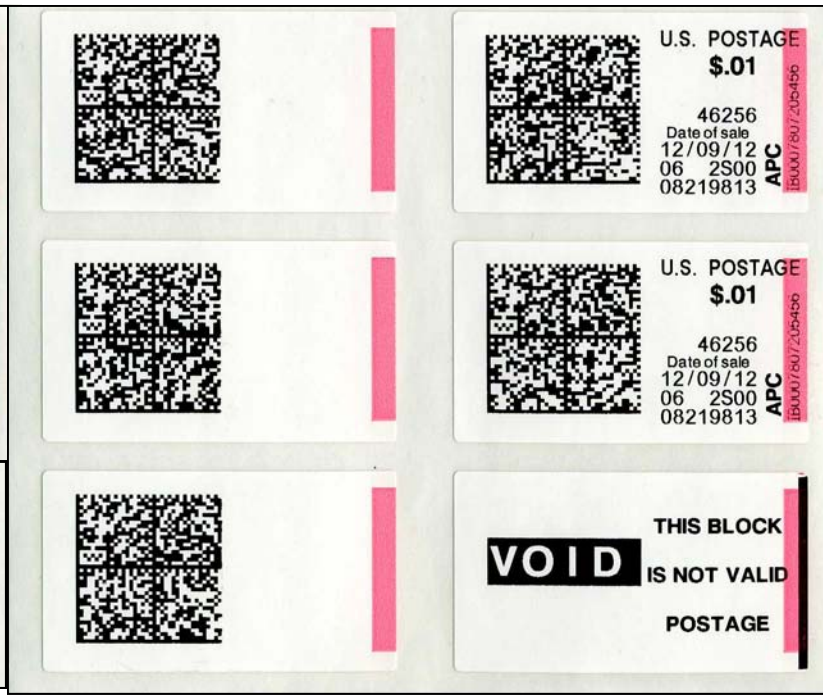
Even a test stamp printed on December 1, 2012 (date code 448) did not seem to cause any action by USPS personnel.



... In the meantime, the 2nd kiosk at the same post office was set to print mailbox labels properly!

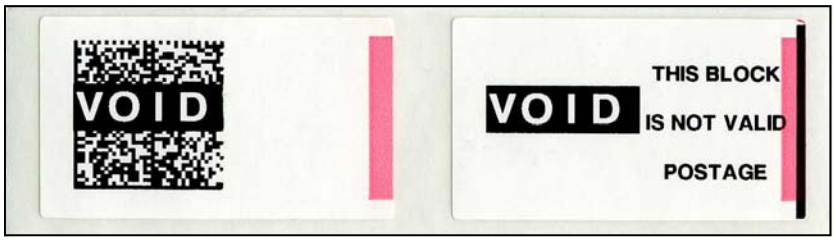
Errors - “Partial Print on Left”





A post office in Indianapolis, Indiana (Zip Code 46256), which should have been in the color label mode at this point in time, was set to print the black & white design labels and dispensed them with an unusual error:
A partially printed label on the left and a fully printed label on the right.

The partially printed labels only contained the design (barcode or design and “FE” serial number), While the barcode label version only contained the barcode (since the serial number for these is usually printed vertically on the right side)



Test labels were also produced at this kiosk, but USPS personnel failed to notice that there was anything wrong!

Even the VOID label on the left should have contained additional printing to the right of the VOID barcode matrix portion on the left label !

Errors - “Missing Print on Right”

Independence, Missouri (Zip Code 64050) produced some interesting errors on the night of December 5, 2012 (date code 452).

Some sort of label feeding problem caused one row of labels to separate and get stuck on the next row, causing partial printing and diagonal cutting of the labels.

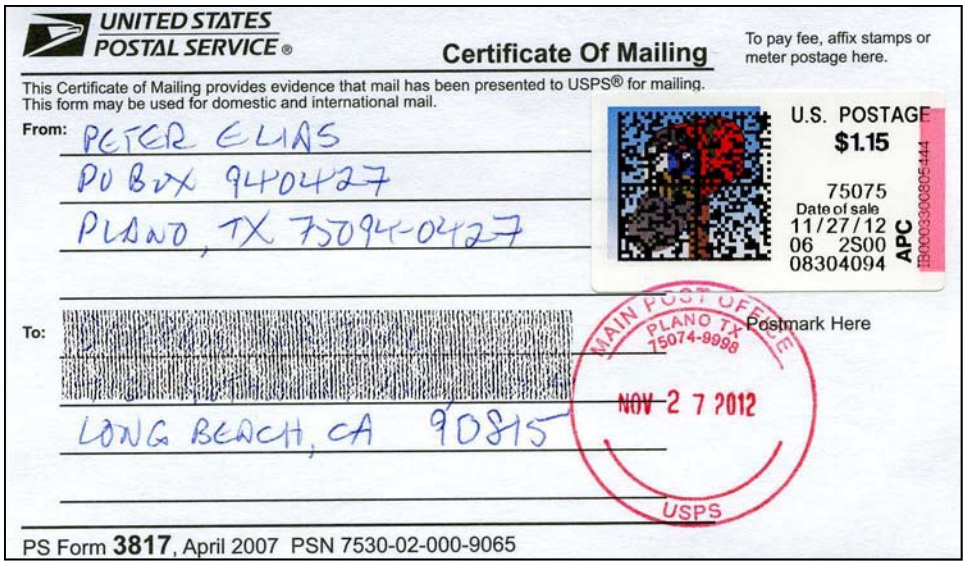
Further purchases from the kiosk at 64050 had left labels which were printed mostly correct (partial missing printing on right side of the left label) and NO PRINTING at all on the right label.

Most likely cause for the error: The thermal print heads on the printer needs to be snapped in place on both the left and right sides for proper printing.

This printer must have had the print head NOT snapped in place properly on the right side, causing the print head to not come into contact with the label on the right side (explaining the partial faded printing left to right and missing print on the right side).

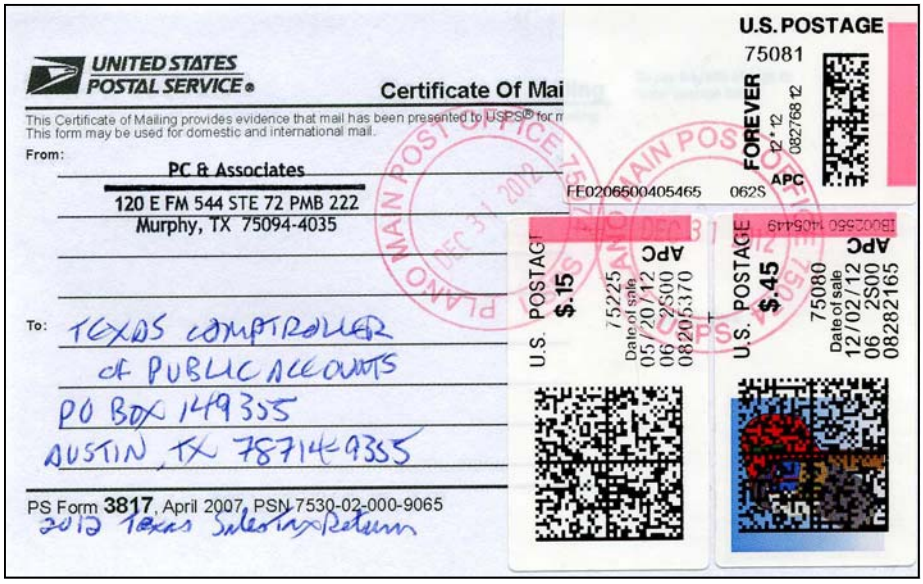
Printing failed at this kiosk shortly after printing several sheets of labels, it was corrected the next day.

Usages - Form 3817



Proper usage of a $1.15 “barcode design on color label design” error label used to pay the fee on the Certificate of Mailing (USPS Form 3817).

Note that the label was purchased on the same day that it was used.

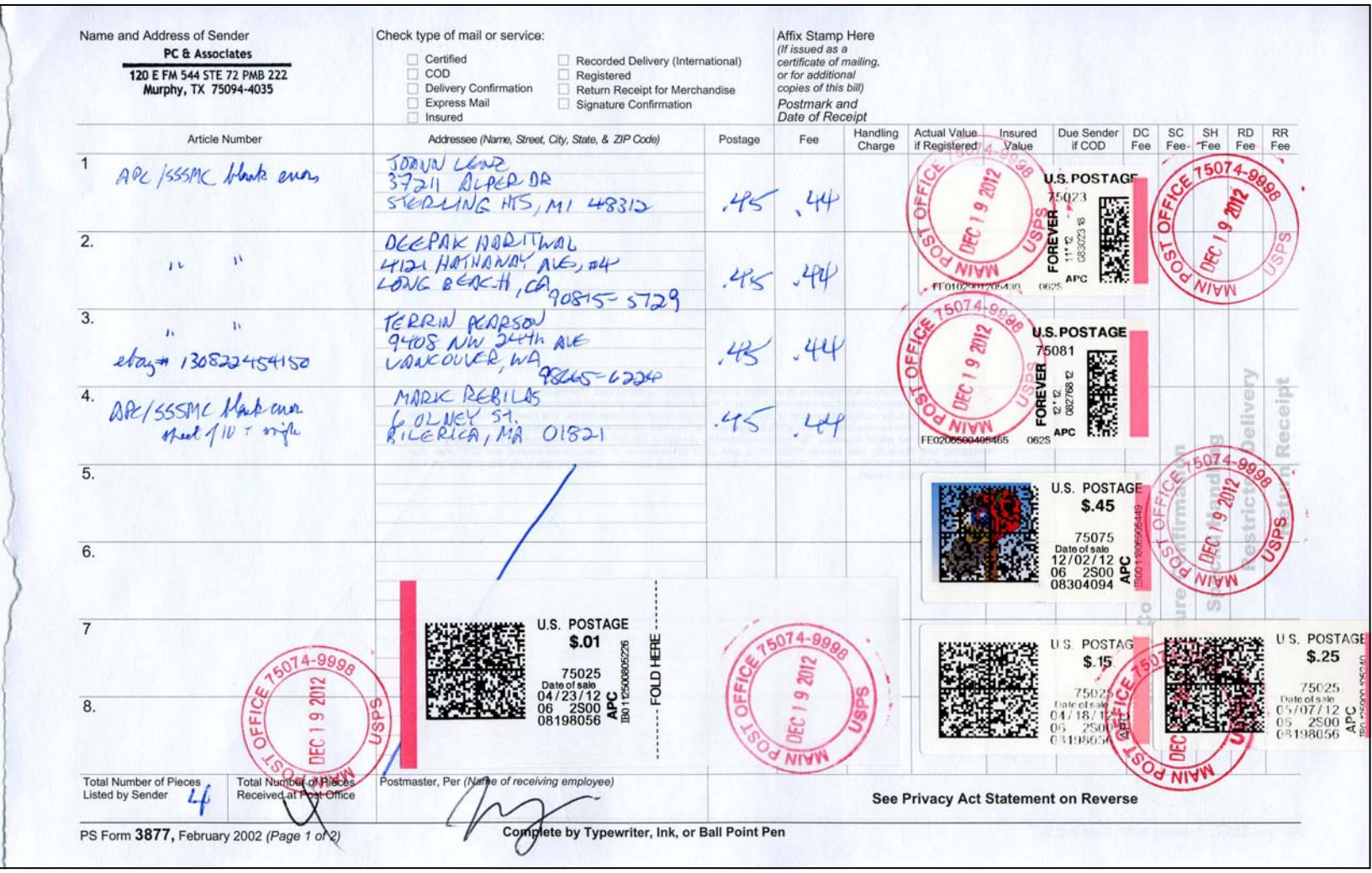


Proper usage of both types of errors
(“blank design” and “black & white barcode design on color label”)
used to pay the $1.15 fee on USPS Form 3817.

Usages - Form 3877

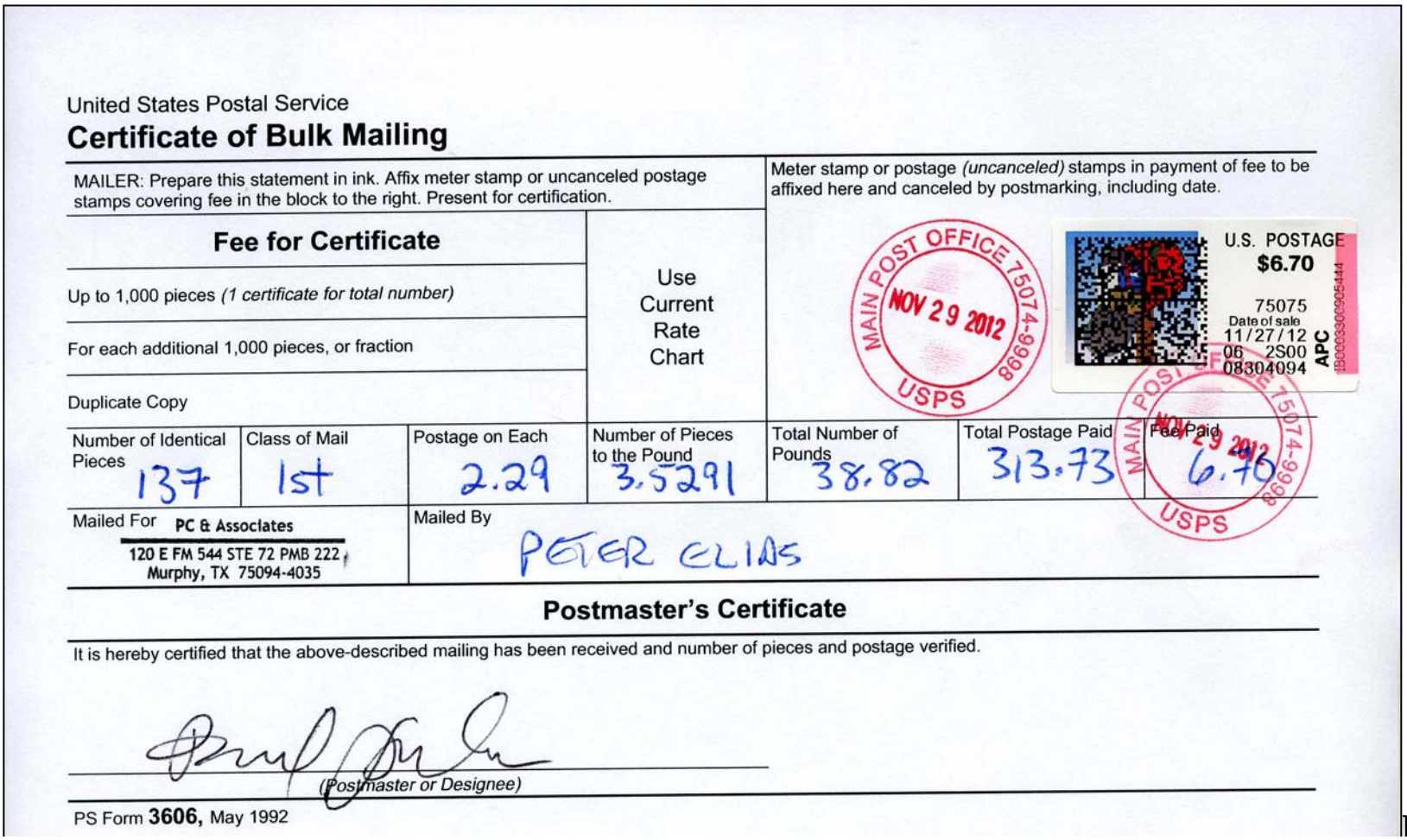
Proper usage of both types of errors (“blank design” and “black & white barcode design on color label”) used in part to pay the $1.76 fee on USPS Form 3877.

*Note that both 11*12 and 12*12 versions of the “blank design” error labels are used.*



(Illustration reduced to fit the size of the page; the actual exhibit will show this form in full size)

Usages - Form 3606



United States Postal Service

Certificate of Bulk Mailing

MAILER: Prepare this statement in ink. Affix meter stamp or uncanceled postage stamps covering fee in the block to the right. Present for certification.

Meter stamp or postage *(uncanceled)* stamps in payment of fee to be affixed here and canceled by postmarking, including date.

Fee for Certificate

Up to 1,000 pieces *(1 certificate for total number)*

For each additional 1,000 pieces, or fraction

Duplicate Copy

Use Current Rate Chart

MAIN POST OFFICE 75074-9998 NOV 29 2012 USPS

U.S. POSTAGE $6.70 75075 Date of sale 11/27/12 06 2S00 08304094 APC

Number of Identical Pieces	Class of Mail	Postage on Each	Number of Pieces to the Pound	Total Number of Pounds	Total Postage Paid	Fee Paid
137	1st	2.29	3.5291	38.82	313.73	6.70

Mailed For PC & Associates
120 E FM 544 STE 72 PMB 222
Murphy, TX 75094-4035

Mailed By PETER ELIAS

Postmaster's Certificate

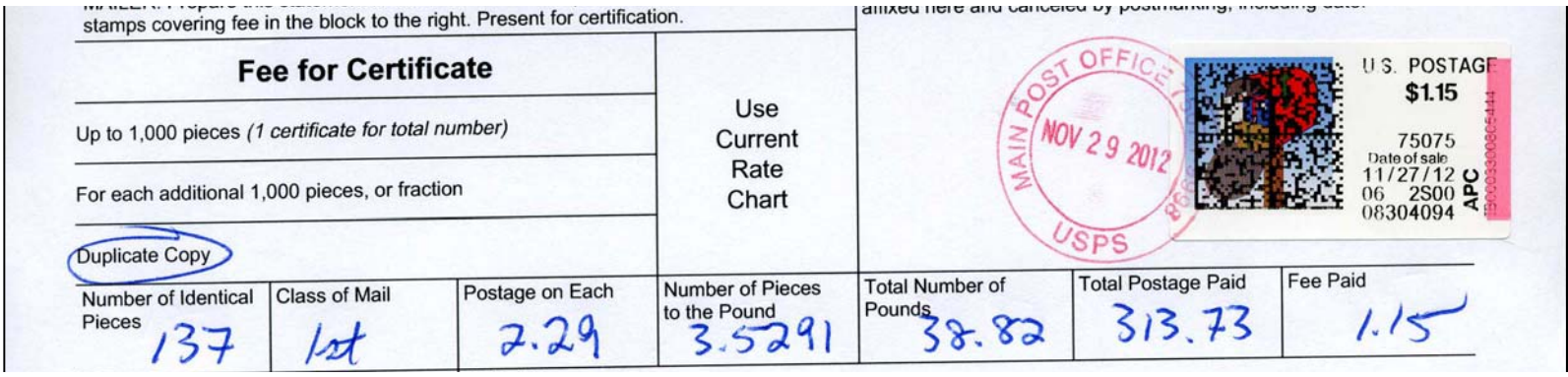
It is hereby certified that the above-described mailing has been received and number of pieces and postage verified.

(Postmaster or Designee)

PS Form **3606,** May 1992

Proper usage of a $6.70 "barcode design on color label" error stamp used to pay the fee for a bulk mailing receipt (USPS Form 3606).

The use of Form 3606 with a $6.70 denominated error stamp is thought to be unique !



stamps covering fee in the block to the right. Present for certification.

affixed here and canceled by postmarking, including date.

Fee for Certificate

Up to 1,000 pieces *(1 certificate for total number)*

For each additional 1,000 pieces, or fraction

Duplicate Copy

Use Current Rate Chart

MAIN POST OFFICE NOV 29 2012 USPS

U.S. POSTAGE $1.15 75075 Date of sale 11/27/12 06 2S00 08304094 APC

Number of Identical Pieces	Class of Mail	Postage on Each	Number of Pieces to the Pound	Total Number of Pounds	Total Postage Paid	Fee Paid
137	1st	2.29	3.5291	38.82	313.73	1.15

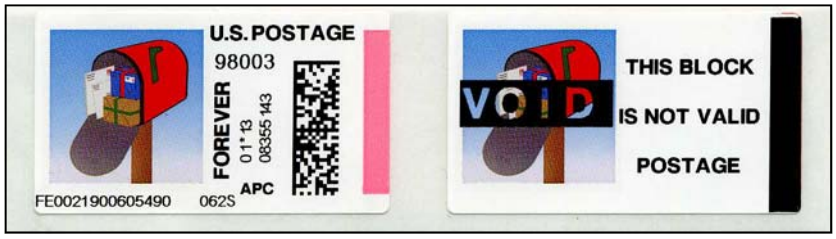
$1.15 denominated error stamp pays the correct rate for a "duplicate" receipt.

Usually when this form is used by businesses, the most common method of payment would be with either a company meter strip or PVI (postage value indicated) USPS strip.

According to the USPS clerk at Plano, Texas (Zip code 75074), he had NOT seen anyone use Form 3606 in at least 10 years!

The Next Phase

The new round sign, seen first in early January, announced the return back to the six different black & white designs (which now retain the "MM*YY" date addition). The color mailbox round sign (see page 1 of this exhibit), said that the sign was to be taken down by December 31, 2012, and according to USPS internal communications, all color holiday labels themselves were supposed to be replaced with the standard (black & white design) labels no later than January 21, 2013.



Most kiosks ran out of labels in late December or early January or were manually switched to the black & white label mode in late December or early/mid January.

Label from January 12, 2013 from Seattle, Washington; the last known date (code 490).