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The Complete Guide to Centralized Mailboxes: Everything Architects and Developers Need to Know

When working on new multifamily projects, there are postal regulations you need to take into consideration when it comes to designing and implementing your centralized mailbox systems. Regulatory compliance is obviously extremely important for your certificate of occupancy but also for the health and well-being of the residents themselves.

When it comes to centralized mailboxes and planning new mail and package centers, the primary regulation that applies is the USPS STD-4C code. However, there are certainly other standards that need to be considered, especially accessibility codes including the American's with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Fair Housing Act (FHA).

Before you design, order and install your next centralized mailbox system, take a gander at this post to ensure you are FHA approved and have both an ADA- and USPS-approved mail delivery system. It will save you a lot of trouble, which generally translates into time and money.

AN INTRODUCTION TO CENTRALIZED MAILBOX CODES

Centralized mail delivery provides postal services to a number of residences from a centrally located installation, whether that be for a single-family subdivision or multi-family property. Business customers may also receive mail delivery from a convenient central hub.

Centralized mailbox regulations are important because USPS now specifies centralized mail delivery for all new construction projects as it is the most efficient method of providing the best service. This keeps the cost of mail service affordable for everybody. If regulations aren't satisfied to streamline this process, there can be an array of issues.

Your project can be hit with costly renovations, delays or restriction of service if your mail system isn't up to par, all of which ruin timelines and are expensive for you and your client. So, what regulations do you need to worry about?
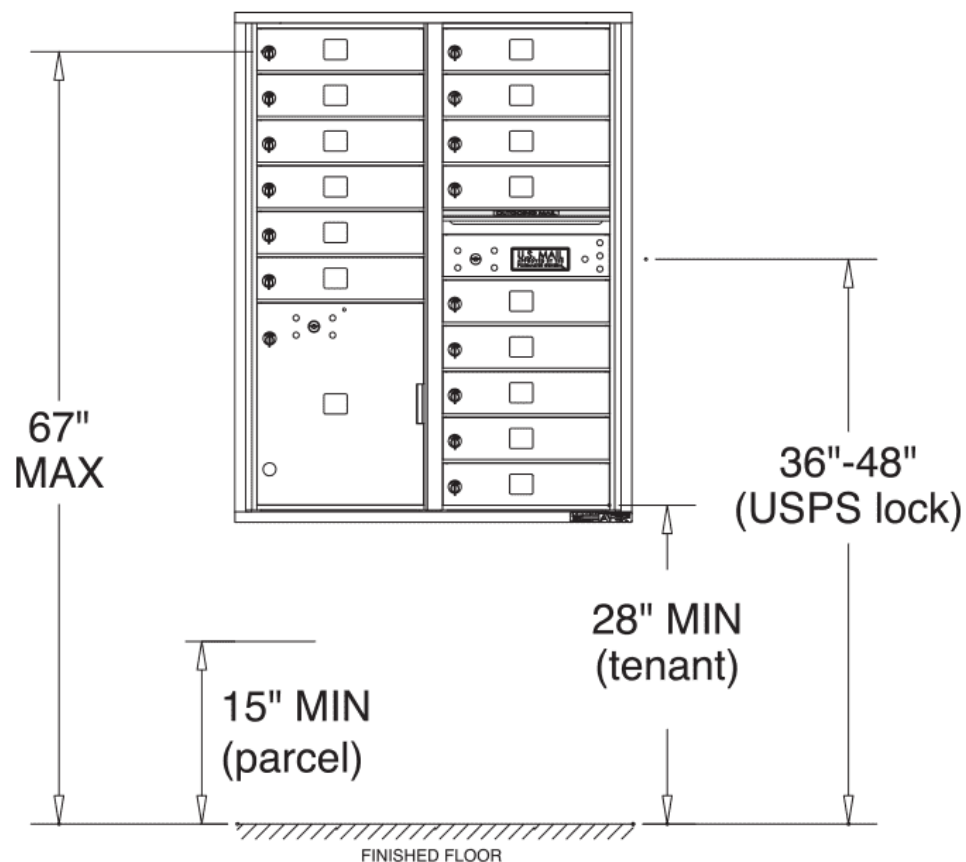
USPS REGULATIONS

In the Postal Operations Manual, the USPS not only specifies the type of equipment to use and the form of delivery needed, but also the placement of the equipment. The primary consideration for USPS is making sure your mailboxes have a safe and efficient line of travel for postal workers and residents.

Working with your local postal officials alongside your project planning will ensure you don't have any major headaches down the road. The USPS is authorized to deny service to anyone who is not 100% compliant. And if the USPS doesn't approve your plan, you or your client won't be able to get a certificate of occupancy.

In order to remain compliant with the USPS STD-4C requirements, you need to have:

- At least one customer compartment positioned less than 48 inches above the finished floor.

- No patron/mailbox lock located more than 67 inches above the finished floor.

- The USPS Arrow lock located between 36 and 48 inches above the finished floor.

- No package locker compartment less than 15 inches from the finished floor.

- No customer compartment should be less than 28 inches from the finished floor.

67" MAX

36"-48" (USPS lock)

28" MIN (tenant)

15" MIN (parcel)

FINISHED FLOOR

The USPS STD-4C regulation was fully implemented in 2006 so it is now well known to architects and developers. The STD-4C changed the performance specifications for wall-mounted mail receptacles to achieve the following objectives:

- Improved mailbox compartment security.

- Customer-friendly compartment designs, which allow mail to be placed flat into the compartment.

- Increased ease of use for mail carriers.

- Large customer compartment capacity for small packages and rolls.

- One package locker for every 5 customer mail compartments. This mailbox:parcel locker requirement was just updated to 5:1 by USPS as of July 2020.

- Secure outgoing mail compartments in every 4C module.

ADA COMPLIANCE

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, or ADA, is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination based on disability. ADA compliance is required in mailrooms.

For interior mailrooms, the ADA specifies that at least 5% of the mailboxes must meet accessibility guidelines. Some local regulations may override that percentage and may require 100% compliance, so make sure you're familiar with your local regulations or work with a mailbox dealer in your area who is.

A local jurisdiction codes inspector may designate an installation must meet the minimum requirement of 5% or up to 100% depending on local requirements. It pays to investigate local building codes related to mail centers because the difference between 5% and 100% is a major design consideration.

The best practice in numbering mailbox compartments is using sequential numbering rather than matching identification to the apartment numbers. Why? It allows you greater flexibility in providing accessible mailbox compartments that meet the necessary ADA regulations.

For the benefit of residents, sequential numbering also gives greater privacy and security. By not tying a mailbox to a specific apartment or house number, you're making each box more secure.

Another option to ensure that 5% of your mailbox system is ADA compliant is to install a completely separate and additional set of mailboxes that fully meet compliance and would only be available for designated mobility units within the multifamily residential community. This alternative would need to be approved by local USPS officials.

FHA COMPLIANCE

FHA stands for the Fair Housing Act, legislation that was enacted and amended prior to ADA to cover those with disabilities as they navigate housing. The design guidelines from FHA are the primary specification that should be followed when you are designing for multi-family residential buildings.

FHA has very specific requirements when it comes to an entire building, but there are only two main regulations that pertain to mailbox systems. One, the building entrance must be accessible and from an accessible route. Two, all public and common areas must be accessible and usable.

The primary difference on forward and side reach ranges is that ADA compliance only requires 5% of the mailboxes to fit within these ranges, while FHA requires compliance to match the appropriate number of covered dwellings pertaining to FHA within the community.

But, there have been DOJ lawsuits in which the result has required that 100% of mailboxes had to be accessible regardless of the number of covered dwellings. Your best bet is to get detailed requirements from the local building codes department at the onset of your planning or make sure 100% of your mailboxes are accessible.

HOW TO DESIGN WHEN COMPLIANCE INTERSECTION OCCURS

The Department of Justice and Urban Planning have jointly stated that if a project falls under ADA and FHA, it needs to be designed to comply with all applicable regulations. When applying this rule to mailboxes, the regulations of the USPS also fall under this umbrella. The standard that is the most stringent requirement of all three regulations must be followed for planning.

When we layer all three regulatory departments, the most stringent requirement of compliance is for your mailboxes to be installed no higher than 48 inches from the finished floor. The lower reach range requirement for all regulations is no lower than 15" from finished floor (FFF). However, the USPS dictates that mailboxes must be no lower than 28 inches FFF while parcel lockers can be installed as low as 15 inches from the floor.

The best thing you can do for your next project is determining which agencies you are required to comply with as early as possible in the design and planning phase. This ensures you allot the appropriate amount of space needed for today's larger mailroom requirements.

This will save you immeasurable amounts of time and trouble because the Postal Service has the authority to deny service to mailboxes that are not properly installed. If you don't comply with applicable codes, you could delay your certificate of

occupancy, or delay mail delivery to your client's residents and the potential for costly renovations.

Florence offers centralized mail solutions for every project and can help ensure compliance with all applicable regulations.

Florence's robust versatile™ 4C mailbox line was developed with a simple-to-use modular system that provides a very flexible solution for your individual project needs.

Standard pre-configured options are available for simple installations, or you can customize a solution to meet the unique needs of your client and residents using the centralized mailbox configurator.

Available in three mounting types — recessed, surface mounted and freestanding in a cabinet — the USPS-Approved versatile 4C solution can effectively replace an outdated mailbox installation be used in a new construction project — whether inside or out.

Florence strives to be more than just a mailbox manufacturer. Our local dealers will partner with you to help you navigate the postal and accessibility requirements for your individual project. Florence's nationwide distributor network ensures you will always have knowledgeable support to assist you in selecting the most appropriate mailbox solution for your project.

Want to learn more about the solutions Florence can offer for your centralized mailbox solutions? Check out Florence's product offerings product catalogs or find your local dealer today.