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Counterfeit and Reused Postage Stamp Manual

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Foreword

This manual is intended for the exclusive use of postal security officials. It contains subject matter which is confidential and should not be disclosed outside the security arena.

Nothing contained in this manual is meant to infer authority for action outside the legal framework of your country or the guidelines and regulations of your own postal administration.

This manual concerns itself mainly with postage stamps and does not look in detail at, for example, the counterfeiting or reuse of postage franking meter labels or bulk permit indicia.

1 Background

This document contains confidential information and its contents should be restricted to a “need to know” basis. Many of the security features appearing in stamps, which are designed to combat fraud, are referred to only in general terms for security reasons.

For the purpose of this document, counterfeiting and reused stamp offences will be dealt with separately.

Historically, the incidence of counterfeiting and reuse of postage stamps was considered low, with actual revenue losses to postal administrations being relatively insignificant compared to losses caused by other types of crime. Over the last 15 years, significant counterfeiting activities in Europe have resulted from counterfeiting of Asian origin mixed with the reuse of postage stamps from which the old cancellation marks have been removed (washing of the stamps or surcharge). In fact, printing “vrai-faux” stamps is not very complicated, and the risk involved is much less than for counterfeit money.

Losses from counterfeiting and reusing postage stamps costs millions to postal administrations and society as a whole. Postage stamps are part of the global trade in counterfeiting, and studies conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) found that imports of counterfeit and pirated goods were worth as much as 464 billion USD in 2019, representing up to 2.5% of global trade. This estimate, however, is based on border and customs interceptions and fails to account of seizures by law enforcement agencies, meaning that the true cost of counterfeiting is likely to be much higher.

Government agencies, online retailers and trading standards agencies focus on counterfeits affecting public health (tobacco, medicines, etc.) or high-value goods (watches, handbags, etc.), meaning that postage stamps are low on their priority list. Criminals have taken advantage of this vacuum.

Most postal administrations suffer losses from counterfeit and criminal reuse of postage stamps. Processes are put into place to detect fraud, especially in the mail pipeline, which can reject mail items with counterfeit stamps. However, criminals take advantage of a lack of verification at the point of sale. Counterfeit stamps cannot be verified by purchasers, and if sold online, customers cannot tell they are counterfeit until they have arrived, by which time the criminal benefit has already been realized.

2 Counterfeiting

2.1 Definition

Counterfeit stamps are those produced other than by postal administrations, post offices or their authorized suppliers, with the primary purpose of deceiving or defrauding postal service customers. They are often copies of stamps issues by postal administrations.

2.2 Criminal law

Each postal administration should add the offences and legal provisions, relevant to its country, to these guidelines as Appendix A.

2.3 *Potential impact*

In the most extreme cases, the presence of counterfeit stamps may not be detected and the postal administration may be providing services for which it is not being paid. Where the counterfeiting is of a sufficiently high standard to escape detection by members of the public, even though the automated processes may reject the stamps, there is a danger that bad publicity and lack of public confidence might cause a large revenue loss or force the postal administrations to embark on costly preventative measures (e.g. a complete redesign of the current stamps). For these and other reasons, it is important to ensure that anti-counterfeiting measures are in place at the initial design stage in order to deter the criminal fraternity from trying to reproduce the stamps.

2.4 *Some reasons why stamp counterfeiting is on the increase*

New technology, for example high-quality colour photocopies and the availability of relatively cheap and compact printing machines, has placed in the hands of the would-be criminal the means to produce counterfeit stamps at a low initial outlay and of a higher quality than would have been possible only a few years ago. While these “counterfeits” should not pass through modern automated machinery without detection, they could easily deceive a member of the public.

Counterfeiting of postage stamps is a lucrative business, especially in times of recession and increasing mailing costs. Some small printing establishments have succumbed to temptation and supplemented their legitimate earnings through counterfeiting. Rarely do these individuals limit their activities solely to the counterfeiting of postage stamps.

The traditional target of counterfeiters has been currency notes. Over the past few years, efforts to improve the security features in currency notes, increased public awareness of the problem, and a determined and far more active approach by law enforcement agencies has encouraged law-breakers to look for easier targets.

It is, therefore, not surprising that postage stamps have attracted their attention, and no doubt will continue to do so.

In addition, some postal authorities have expanded the number of outlets selling postage stamps, including using commercial retailers. In these cases, stock control and audit procedures may be outside the control of the postal administration. Such commercial operations generally offer lower levels of security procedures and are therefore more readily penetrated by criminals seeking low-risk opportunities to distribute counterfeit products. The rise of online sales platforms has made it easier for those selling counterfeit stamps. Websites often mimicking genuine postal sellers, including administrators, can be created, offering reduced priced stamps. Websites also offer anonymity to sellers as they do not have to provide details when setting up the websites.

E-retailers, such as Amazon, eBay and Alibaba, often have counterfeit goods policies which prevent their sale. However, counterfeit goods are sold via these platforms. Other platforms, such as Meta and Facebook Marketplace, are less inclined to work with law enforcement to prevent the sale of counterfeits on their sites. Other platforms, such as Etsy, which do not fit the business model of an e-retailer that would sell stamps, are selling stamps. Increasingly, many sellers will state that their stamps are not valid for postage or philatelic use, creating a grey area for e-retailers and customers. However, criminal offences are still being committed and the items are considered counterfeit according to the retailers' policies.

2.5 *Features which make counterfeiting more difficult*

2.5.1 *Paper*

In general, the paper used to produce counterfeit stamps is of a significantly lower quality than that used to produce genuine stamps. The difference in quality may be detected by feel, but this is not a reliable test when the stamps are affixed to an envelope. Two features that might also be visible on a casual examination, are the use of paper containing optical brightening agents and the absence of security fibres, which are used in some postage stamp production.

2.5.2 Perforations

Counterfeiters once found it very difficult to accurately reproduce the number and consistency of genuine perforations around all four sides of the stamp. This task is made even more difficult when elliptical or irregular perforations are included in the design. Other perforation styles (e.g. “rotary” and “pin” perforations) require different techniques, and postal administrations may wish to appraise these methods to enhance security. Some caution is required before placing too much reliance on perforations. In a recent major counterfeiting case in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the perforations, including elliptical perforations, were reproduced almost perfectly.

2.5.3 Design of the stamp and colour combinations

In general, the easiest stamps to counterfeit are those consisting of single colours, particularly pale colours, and those with simple designs. Multicolour stamps with complex designs provide a greater challenge to the counterfeiter, require more specialist printing equipment, and may make the exercise uneconomical from the criminal’s point of view. The colours should be blends or mixes designed to make counterfeiting by offset lithography or colour copier difficult. Unblended primary colours, such as red, yellow, black and blue, should be avoided as singular colours. Metallic colours, e.g. silvers and golds, are especially difficult to accurately copy and, at present at least, prevent reproduction by use of a colour photocopier. Even more sophisticated are the metallic images which appear to change colour when held at different angles to the light. Care should be taken, however, to ensure that the additional security features do not raise the production costs to an unacceptable level compared to the potential risk. Metal foils and holograms are only really appropriate for special-issue and/or high-value stamps rather than high volume production. In general, criminals are more likely to counterfeit those values which have the highest “market penetration” and thus offer the greatest return on investment. While postal administrations would wish to concentrate their main security improvements on this more vulnerable area of the market, frequent changes in stamp design pose other problems that have to be balanced against security requirements.

2.5.4 Printing techniques

The most common forms of stamp printing, such as letterpress, photoengraving, offset, intaglio and digital, have left place today for crypto stamps (and their relatives).

The digital process is particularly suitable for small series, and very popular with post offices owing to its short and automatable lead times. Unfortunately, even if it relies on very high-level printing machines, it remains a print dependent on other security criteria to be associated with it.

The historically most common denominations (excluding digital) generally remain printed, using lithogravure or rotogravure processes. Intaglio printing brings out the inked area of the stamps, and this raised area can easily be felt by running one’s fingers over the stamps. This type of process is used effectively in the production of some countries’ currency (e.g. that of the UK).

2.5.5 Additives to the paper and/or the ink

Most modern postage stamps now carry either some form of fluorescent or phosphorescent material, or a combination of the two, usually as a surface coating or as “bands” or “bars”, to allow the automatic stamp cancelling machinery both to recognize that the postage has been paid and to segregate the stamps according to the denominations. Fluorescence, which is clearly visible under ultraviolet (UV) light, masks the afterglow of the phosphor when it is exposed to a suitable light source, and the counterfeiter may not realize that it is present. Fluorescence alone may not be reliable as a counterfeit deterrent in stamps because of its availability in various products and substances as well as in nature. Recent counterfeit stamps discovered in the UK contained fluorescence but not phosphor. These stamps appeared to be genuine when exposed to UV light but were rejected by the stamp cancelling machinery. Counterfeit phosphor tends to be brighter than that on genuine stamps. At present, phosphor appears to be one of the most important security precautions in combating counterfeiting. Phosphors are relatively difficult to counterfeit or obtain, and have characteristic lifetimes that can be measured against arbitrary standards. The absence of phosphor is unlikely to be detected on items that do not pass through the automatic stamp cancelling machinery. It follows that supplies of phosphor and security inks, from production through to delivery and storage, must be strictly controlled and protected as secure items. Regular inspections of these arrangements are advisable. In addition, it is also recommended that such inspections should include the arrangements for disposing of “printers’ waste”. Specialist advice

needs to be obtained on the range of inks available to improve security. These include photochromic or thermochromic inks (although they present “stability” problems), as well as metallic and optically variable inks. Owing to their cost and limitations as to printing methods, general use of these inks may not be practical.

2.5.6 *Watermarks/iridescence /microprinting/data matrix coding*

Watermarks or iridescence on stamps increases their production costs, but provides excellent security. They can also be combined with unique characteristics, such as booklet and year codes, to provide additional security. Counterfeit stamps have attempted, but generally failed, to mimic the watermarks on stamps. Moreover, they often miss the codes and have incorrect spelling. For instance, in 2020, a British counterfeit stamp had Royal Mail (sic) within the watermark.

Microprinting is another security measure. Counterfeiters may use microprinting but tend to put in the wrong location, and the quality of the microprint might not be as clear as a genuine stamp. For this reason, it may be one of the first factors that it is recommended to check. Microprinting may also spoil the appearance of special issue stamps and affect their popularity on the philatelic market.

Data matrix coding is a cryptographically secure, traceable and unique identifying feature (e.g. QR codes, serial numbers, etc.). These codes make it easier to detect counterfeiting and prevent the illegal reuse of philatelic products.

2.5.7 Barcodes have been introduced for postage stamps in the UK and in some European postal administrations. These stamps have a unique barcode, which is rejected if used again. The unique barcode features a number of unique non-sequential characters, which are compared with data held in secure storage. Counterfeit barcoded stamps have been produced which are of high quality. However, they fail to decipher the unique barcodes. Instead, they use the same barcodes for each booklet or sheet. Machinery detects and rejects these in the mail pipeline, but does not prevent them from being sold to customers.

2.6 *Identifying counterfeit stamps*

It is important that the presence of counterfeit stamps is detected at the earliest opportunity to allow “alerts” and/or additional security and detection processes to be put into place. Most counterfeit stamps should be rejected by modern automatic stamp cancelling equipment and any apparent abnormal increase in rejection rates should be brought to the notice of a supervisor immediately. It may be useful to take regular samples of 100 pieces at a time from those rejected by sorting equipment, both to concentrate the examination process and to develop awareness amongst sorting staff. The temptation, which must be resisted, is to assume that the increased rejection rate is due to machinery malfunction and that the solution is to adjust the equipment to a higher tolerance level. It is important, however, that the equipment sorting tolerance is regularly maintained and verified, and that instructions are established and communicated to frontline staff and supervisors. Variations in colour, inaccurate alignment of perforations, the feel of the paper, etc. are all indications that the stamp might not be genuine. Information received (“tips”) can play an important part in the identification process.

Notably, there are some features which immediately indicate that a stamp is counterfeit. These include:

- Stamps are placed on non-standard backing papers (e.g. the same booklets are not used to sell the stamps, or waxed paper is used);
- Stamps are sold in numbers which do not match the postal administration’s selling profile, such as selling on sheets of 25, 33 and 66 stamps when the postal administration only sells sheets of 4, 8 and 100 stamps;
- Stamps are misaligned on the sheet or paper.

2.7 *Forensic examination*

In the final analysis, detection of counterfeit postage stamps is made through a side-by-side comparison of an authenticated stamp with a suspected counterfeit stamp of the same variety. Determinations of authenticity are based on the presence of agreement in printing process characteristics and the aforementioned physical characteristics, with no unexplainable features. Forensic exams may take some time to complete and should be factored into any timelines.

Postal administrations should also ensure that expert witnesses are identified within the business, as this may be required for court purposes.

3 Reused postage stamps

3.1 Definition

These are postage stamps already used for payment for the service provided, but which are then used again. The term “stamp washing” is heard a lot and is usually taken to indicate that the stamps have been soaked or treated in some type of solution to remove the cancellation marks. Technically, “stamp washing” is only the act of removing the stamps from the envelope, etc., but in the context of this manual it will be taken to include the entire process. The entire process means both removing the stamp from its original surface (usually by simply soaking it in water), cleaning off previous cancellation marks by use of a solvent, and affixing the stamp to a new surface or at least applying fresh adhesive to the reverse side. Reused stamps also include those which for some reason have escaped cancellation during their progress through the mail stream. The reuse of stamps not cancelled during mail processing is not a violation of law in all countries, although it violates most administrations’ regulations. Even in those countries where a law exists, security investigators may have problems proving their case by supplying the necessary evidence.

3.2 The history of stamp washing

Stamp washing and attempts to avoid postage are not new. The first postage stamp was the “Penny Black”, which was issued in the UK in 1840. The first incident of stamp washing took place the same year.

3.3 Criminal law

As mentioned earlier (2.2), Appendix A should contain the relevant offences for your country. However, the following practices should be prohibited under the legislation of most countries:

- a Evasion of postage;
- b Reuse of previously used postage stamps;
- c Fraudulent removal of a postmark (“washing” of postage stamps);
- d Counterfeiting of stamps and postage meter impressions;
- e Fraudulent negotiation of counterfeit postage stamps;
- f Possessing material for counterfeiting stamps;
- g Counterfeiting of pre-printed paid stationery;
- h Defrauding the government;
- i Theft of government property.

3.4 Source of previously used stamps

Reused stamps are obtained from various sources, e.g. businesses that receive large volumes of mail or charitable organizations. These stamps are then sold on to stamp dealers, etc. An unscrupulous buyer may then “wash” the stamps and make a considerable profit.

Unscrupulous sellers also take advantage of postal authorities’ failure to “cancel” stamps by collecting them and reselling them as unused. If barcodes are used to denote uniqueness (as in the UK), then these reused stamps can be identified by machines.

3.5 Security measures/procedures to make stamp washing more difficult

3.5.1 Uncancelled stamps

Quite clearly, a stamp which has escaped cancellation during its passage through the system is the easiest stamp to reuse and the most difficult area to prove criminal intent. Stamps can escape cancellation when envelopes are bunched together. This is sometimes referred to as skips or double passes. The number of stamps which miss cancellation can be as high as 8% of the traffic on the oldest type of machinery, but less

than 1% on more modern equipment. Given the volumes of mail dealt with each day, even a 1% error rate is considerable. Work needs to continue to develop machines with a much lower error rate, and the older type of machines should be phased out. If stamps are observed to have passed through the system uncanceled, the delivery officer should make a manual cancellation to prevent their reuse. It is obvious that this does not always happen, and a combination of communication with the staff, closer supervision, and the possible introduction of an incentive scheme may assist. These points will be covered in more detail later in the manual.

3.5.2 *Cancelled stamps*

Achieving a “permanent” cancellation mark depends on a number of factors, such as the type of paper used, the position of the stamp on the envelope, the efficiency of the sorting/cancelling equipment (e.g. the pressure at which the ink is applied), and the quick drying properties of the ink itself. The time delay between the cancellation mark being made and the attempt to wash the stamp is also an important factor (i.e. the longer the delay the more difficult it is to remove the mark). Offset printed stamps are generally harder to effectively cancel because the paper is less absorbent and the printed area is glossier. Photogravure printed items accept the ink more readily. In an ideal world, inks should dry rapidly (before the minimum possible period between cancellation and delivery), but quick-drying inks may cause additional machine blockage and adversely affect costs. As with most things, it is likely to require a balance and a compromise. The length of time and the condition in which cancellation ink is stored may also affect its quality when used.

3.5.3 *Stamp design and colours*

A “busy” multi-coloured pictorial design may leave insufficient white (or light coloured) areas for any cancellation mark to be readily visible. Most stamps have a white border, which makes the stamp aesthetically pleasing but also allows cancellation ink to be seen. The worst combination is a black cancellation mark on a black stamp. Ideally, stamp designs should take into consideration security requirements to help prevent fraud.

3.5.4 *The use of fugitive ink*

Fugitive ink is basically a type of ink which “runs” when exposed to water. The use of such ink in the stamp manufacturing process could well be a very effective means of protection against washing. Unfortunately, water may come into contact with stamps/envelopes in the course of normal delivery, and philatelic considerations may make the use of fugitive inks unacceptable.

3.5.5 *Gums*

Work to perfect a gum that would make it virtually impossible to remove the stamp once it has been affixed to the envelope may also provide a real deterrent to stamp washers. Philatelic considerations, however, currently make the use of this gum impractical. Security ovals have also been added to UK stamps, which means that there is damage to the ovals from the peeling process.

3.6 *Coated stamps*

This type of stamp does not usually appear in large numbers and is more of a nuisance than a serious attempt to defraud. Nevertheless, the deliberate reuse of any of these stamps, which have been “coated” to prevent the cancellation mark penetrating the stamp, leads to loss of revenue and is usually a criminal offence. In general, these stamps are easy to recognize, but the presence of material such as adhesive tape across the surface of the stamp will not necessarily mean that an offence has been committed (i.e. that the sender or addressee intends the stamp not to be properly cancelled). Stamps whose entire surface has been “coated” by the application of gum, lacquer, etc. are rarely produced innocently by these methods, but it may be necessary to prove intent at the time this was done. Coated stamps may be found at every point of the sorting process and are frequently destined for addresses overseas. They are usually sent by young persons (e.g. students on a budget), people writing to pen pals, members of computer clubs, etc. It may be possible, by examining the stamp and envelope, to obtain other clues as to whether fraud is being committed.

Things to look out for include the following:

- The surface of the stamp will frequently have a “shiny” appearance, particularly if the envelope is tilted slightly;
- Careful examination of the stamp surface may also reveal some traces of previous cancellation marks;

- There may be other examples of envelopes of the same type in similar handwriting;
- There may be some indication on the rear of the envelope that the sender wishes to have the stamp returned. The sender sometimes leaves instructions using a simple code.

3.7 *Characteristics which may help to identify reused and washed stamps*

Washed or used stamps may lose their phosphor tagging and should be rejected by the stamp cancellation equipment. Rejected stamps should be examined carefully. Genuine stamps, which for some reason have been retained by the purchaser for some time (i.e. old denominations), can suffer slight deterioration of the surface area, which may cause rejection by the sorting equipment. Examination of rejected mail or other suspicious items can reveal one or more of the following characteristics, suggestive of the physical or chemical removal of cancellation impressions:

- Loss of colour;
- Stains and dispersion of ink dyes on stamp faces;
- Fibre shift or fibre destruction;
- Torn edges and surface areas;
- Lack of an adhesive backing (or non-standard backing);
- Excessive quantities of gum applied;
- Paper warpage;
- Ink embedded into fibres;
- Visible signs of previous cancellation marks;
- Stamps used in ‘make-up’ combinations (e.g. high and low values);
- Stamps which may be overlapping slightly to obscure the slight trace of a previous cancellation mark or damaged area caused by washing;
- Use of double-sided adhesive tape to fix the stamp to the envelope;
- Use of “old” commemorative or special-issue stamps;
- Stamps which smell of chemicals or talcum powder.

Close examination of the stamp surface may reveal some traces of a previous cancellation mark. Markings which are not detectable through visual inspection may be discernible using other techniques (e.g. infrared and/or UV).

3.8 *Illegally “surcharged” stamps*

An overprint is an extra layer of text or visual that is applied onto philatelic products after their initial printing. Although primarily used by post offices for administrative and marketing purposes, overprinting methods are being used illegally. Counterfeiters are purchasing low denomination stamps, overprinting them with a higher face value, and then reselling them as a way of laundering money, for instance.

Illegally “surcharged” stamps can be difficult to detect because the underlying stamp is legitimate, thus bypassing all the security measures implemented by the designated operator.

3.9 *Communications*

Early indication of the presence of reused stamps in the system is essential to reduce the potential loss and maximize the detection rate. Not all washed or reused stamps will be rejected by machinery. The first line of defence is the postal worker collecting, sorting or delivering the mail, who needs to be made aware of the possibility of reused stamps entering the system, the characteristics of reused stamps, and the serious loss that such activities cause the postal service. There is a need to manually cancel stamps that have escaped cancellation during the automatic process, and to take action when suspicious items are found. This can be achieved through a combination of written instructions, training at team meetings, and the use of posters, etc. in the sorting establishment. It should be emphasized that the vast majority of used stamps are discovered by alert postal employees. It is important that staff are educated in recognition techniques and encouraged to

remain alert. Regular sampling of mail by trained personnel at large mechanized facilities can provide valuable information to security personnel.

3.10 *Incentive schemes*

Some countries once considered paying incentives to those who reported the detection of unused or already used stamps. However, the application of incentive programmes, which was considered according to their relevance by each postal administration, has never really come to fruition.

3.11 *Other means by which the presence of reused stamps may come to light*

Examination of advertisements appearing in the press, in the less reputable stamp magazines, and in social network and e-commerce platforms may show that current postage stamps are being offered for sale at below face value.

Portable infrared video imaging systems have long been easily moved between installations. This equipment not only enabled the capture and manipulation of high-resolution images of suspicious objects, but it also produced a paper copy clear enough to show the previous cancellation mark. Today, however, caught up with the technological growth of counterfeiters, these devices no longer suffice and need to be complemented with other detecting techniques.

Postal authorities should look to set up a dedicated person/team to monitor online selling platforms and regularly make purchases to check the validity of stamps. Subsequently, they should liaise with the selling platform to remove confirmed sellers of reused/counterfeit stamps.

4 Marketing/disposal of counterfeit and reused stamps

Counterfeit stamps are usually sold for less than their face value. Channels of distribution vary from country to country. The most common method for counterfeit sales is via online retail platforms, or by creating own websites which often mimic those of postal administrations.

The majority of online retail platforms and domain registrars do not allow counterfeit produce to be sold. Therefore, they have mechanisms in place to report counterfeit and washed stamps.

Ideally, proactive policies should be put in place where the retail platform itself takes responsibility for taking down listings.

Business customers, who normally obtain their stamps from postal administrations or authorized outlets, may be tempted to purchase cut-price stamps for their own use or for resale at full price. While they may be aware that fraudulent activities are taking place, they commonly assume that they are handling stolen rather than counterfeit stamps.

Reused stamps are often sold to local organizations and charities. Third-party mailers can take advantage of the cost advantages and, owing to their large-scale postings, make a considerable impact on postal revenue in a short space of time.

Charitable organizations can be encouraged into carrying out due diligence checks of bulk buyers of used stamps or even discouraged from this means of fund raising.

Creating public service announcements can be an effective tool for raising awareness of counterfeits and potentially curbing the purchase of items below face value.

5 Investigative guidelines

5.1 *Contraband postage stock*

The term “contraband postage” encompasses a wide range of unauthorized postage, including counterfeit stamps, previously used stamps (washed), counterfeit postage meter impressions, fake permit imprints, stamp stock obtained in burglaries of post offices and surplus stamps intended for destruction.

5.2 *Counterfeit stamps*

Counterfeit stamps are postage stock produced by anyone other than a postal administration or its authorized stamp printers according to the laws of the country. They are counterfeited primarily to deceive or defraud the postal administration, but some counterfeiting is also done to defraud stamp collectors. Typically, an offence is committed when anyone counterfeits a postage stamp or postage meter impression, or prints or knowingly uses, sells or possesses (with intent to use or sell) any counterfeit postage stamp. An individual may also commit an offence if they possess any special paper or printing materials for the production of stamps or stamped envelopes.

5.3 *Reused postage stamps*

Postage stamps on which the cancellation marks have been removed are termed “washed.” This includes stamps which have been soaked in any solution to remove the cancellation marks, or where other means, such as erasure, are used. Usually, an individual commits an offence if they remove cancellation marks from stamps with the intent of using or selling them for postal purposes.

5.4 *Illegal surcharge*

Postage stamps on which the face value has been knowingly altered are called “overprinted.” Please note that this technique is legally used by postal administrations for reuse purposes. An individual commits an offence if they take such action; only the postal operator that owns the stamp issued is legitimate.

5.5 *Evidence*

If envelopes, parcels or express mail packages bearing suspect counterfeit stamps are detected, they need to be tested by a qualified document inspector. Usually, the postage stamp(s) and envelope are needed as evidence. Suspicious mailing envelopes may be hand-delivered to addressees, who may remove the contents, initial and date the envelope, and then return it to the investigating official. Caution should, however, be exercised when contacting the addressees under such circumstances, to avoid the perception that someone may be scrutinizing their mail on a regular basis. In addition, the addressee should be cautioned not to contact the sender regarding the matter.

5.6 *Policy*

Investigations should be conducted for all incidents involving counterfeit stamps, previously used stamps, counterfeit postage meter impressions, unauthorized use of postage meters, stamp stock obtained in burglaries of post offices, and the theft of surplus stamps intended for destruction. However, the primary purpose of pursuing these investigations is to protect the revenue of the Post. Investigations should also aim to be cost effective.

If it is not cost effective to investigate, other tools should be explored, such as legal cease and desist processes as well as takedown of listings, websites and accounts of sellers. Effective collaboration between countries on identified counterfeiters and shipments can only benefit investigations and incident mitigation.

Charging stamp users and/or recipients can also prove to be a deterrent, although it can come at the expense of customer service. Destruction of mail pieces of persistent users can also be a consideration if proportionate and legal in respective jurisdictions.

As counterfeit stamp producers become more sophisticated, postal administrations need to consider training requirements for specialized teams in their units in order to identify and distinguish between genuine and counterfeit stamps.

Effective programmes to prevent and mitigate counterfeit postage stamps are crucial to ensure revenue protection and continued customer confidence in the Post.