

**DELAWARE COUNTY SECONDARY ROAD DEPARTMENT  
POLICY AND PROCEDURE MEMORANDUM**

**SUBJECT:** Mailbox Installation in County Rights of Way

**Problem:** Highway and roadside safety is the primary reason for Delaware County regulating the placement and type of mailboxes located within county rights of way. National crash data studies show that between 70 and 100 people die each year in crashes with improperly designed mailboxes and their supports (AASHTO statistics, 2002 Roadside Design Guide, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition). Mailbox and newspaper delivery boxes like utility poles, telephone pedestals, and other appurtenances in the right of way are a necessary part of providing services and access to rural residences. Mailboxes however, much like traffic control devices and signs, are located very close to the traveled portion of the roadway, usually right on the shoulder of the road. Unlike traffic control devices and signs however, mailboxes and similar items are placed on the roadway at random by many different people and guidelines for their placement are often not known by those who install them. Also, unlike traffic signs and other traffic control devices, mailbox supports are installed with little regard to their potential for causing a roadside hazard if they are struck by an errant vehicle.

The large, unyielding mailbox supports placed by some rural residents, while intended to be attractive decorations or to provide vandal proof mounting for mailboxes or newspaper delivery boxes, can create a severe crash hazard by their very nature and location in the roadway. To achieve their purpose of allowing ready access to rural letter carriers, they are mounted at windshield height and placed on the edge of the road where they are vulnerable to being struck by an errant vehicle. Mailboxes create a hazard to vehicles and the occupants of those vehicles because of this windshield level mounting height since the windshield is the weakest part of the protective cage provided to vehicle occupants by the automobile frame and body panels.

**Discussion:** All mailbox installations must meet U. S. Postal Service Regulations, which are part of this installation policy, but those installations must also meet county requirements for safety so that the mailbox and its support are not a hazard to traffic. This mailbox installation policy is based on a sample policy provided within the AASHTO Roadside Design Guide, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, which was published in 2002 by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). This policy is also developed to keep the county in compliance with its legal duty to remove obstructions within the right of way as required by Chapter 319 of the Code of Iowa.

## **Policy: Mailbox and Newspaper Delivery Box Installation on County Roads**

### SECTION 1: SCOPE

No mailbox or newspaper delivery box, hereinafter both referred to as a mailbox, will be allowed to exist on Delaware County Secondary Road rights of way if it interferes with the safety of the traveling public or the function, maintenance, or operation of the highway system. A mailbox installation not conforming to the provisions of this regulation is an unauthorized encroachment within the right of way and may be declared as an obstruction under chapter 319 of the Code of Iowa.

The location and construction of mailboxes shall conform to the rules and regulation of the U.S. Postal Service as well as to standards established by the Delaware County Secondary Road Department. Delaware County standards for the location and construction of mailboxes are available from:

Delaware County Engineers Office  
P.O. Box 68 – 2139 Highway 38  
Delaware, Iowa 52036  
Phone: 563-927-3505

A permit for the installation of a mailbox is required by Section 319.14 of the Code of Iowa. That permit is available at the address listed above. A mailbox installation that conforms to the following criteria will be considered acceptable unless, in the judgment of the County Engineer, the installation interferes with the safety of the traveling public or the function, maintenance, or operation of the highway system.

### SECTION 2: LOCATION

No mailbox will be permitted where access is obtained from a freeway or where access is otherwise prohibited by law or regulation.

Mailboxes shall be located on the right hand side of the roadway in the carrier's direction of travel route except on one-way streets where they may be placed on the left hand side of the road. The bottom of the box shall be set at an elevation established by the U.S. Postal Service, usually between 39 inches and 48 inches above the roadway surface as measured from the shoulder of the road. The optimum installation height is 42 inches. The roadside face of the box shall be offset from the edge of the traveled way by a distance of no less than the greater of the following:

- 8 feet (where no paved shoulder exists and the shoulder cross slope is 13% or flatter)
- the width of the all weather (rock or turf) shoulder present plus 8"-12" to face of box

- the width of an all weather turnout specified by the Secondary Road Department plus 8"-12" to the face of the box

Exceptions to the placement criteria above will exist on subdivision streets and certain designated rural roads where the County Engineer deems it in the public interest to permit lesser clearances or to require greater clearances. On curbed streets, the roadside face of the mailbox shall be set back from the face of the curb a distance of 6" – 12". On residential or subdivision streets and rural roads without all weather shoulders that carry low traffic volumes operating at low speeds, the roadside face of the mailbox shall be offset between 8" and 12" beyond the edge of the pavement or edge of the road. On very low volume rural roads with low operating speeds, the Secondary Road Department may find it acceptable to offset mailboxes a minimum of 6 feet from the traveled way and under some low-volume, low-speed applications may accept clearances as low as 32 inches.

Where a mailbox is located at a driveway entrance, it shall be placed on the far side of the driveway in the carrier's direction of travel. This location better accommodates county snow removal operations.

Where a mailbox is located near an intersecting road, it shall be located a minimum of 100 feet beyond the centerline of the intersecting road in the carrier's direction of travel. This distance shall be increased to 200 feet when the average daily traffic on the intersecting road exceeds 400 vehicles per day.

Where the mailbox is installed in the vicinity of an existing guardrail, it should, wherever practical, be placed behind the guardrail.

### 3.0 STRUCTURE

Mailboxes shall be of light sheet metal or plastic construction conforming to the requirements of the U. S. Postal Service. Newspaper delivery boxes shall be of light metal or plastic construction and of the minimum dimensions suitable for holding a newspaper. Some mailboxes approved by USPS may not meet county crash requirements. Manufacturers and models approved by USPS do not necessarily signify any endorsement by AASHTO or the Delaware County Secondary Road Department. Questions on compliance with USPS or Delaware County regulations should be directed your local postmaster and /or the County Engineer.

No more than two mailboxes may be mounted on a support structure unless crash tests have shown the support structure and mailbox arrangement to be safe. However, lightweight newspaper boxes may be mounted below the mailbox on the side of the mailbox support.

Mailbox supports shall not be set in concrete unless crash tests have shown the support design to be safe.

A single 4" by 4" square or 4" diameter wooden post; or metal post, Schedule 40 2" diameter (nominal size IPS; external diameter 2 3/8"; maximum wall thickness 0.154 inches) or smaller, embedded no more than 24 inches into the ground, shall be acceptable as a mailbox support. A metal post shall not be fitted with an anchor plat, but may have an anti-twist device that extends no more than 10 inches below the ground surface.

The post to box attachment details should be of sufficient strength to prevent the box from separating from the post top if the installation is struck by a vehicle. The exact support hardware dimensions and design may vary, such as having a two-piece platform bracket or alternative slot and holed locations. The product must result in a satisfactory attachment of the mailbox to the post, and all components must fit together properly.

The minimum spacing between centers of support posts shall be three fourths of the height of the posts above the ground line. Mailbox support designs not described in this section are acceptable if approved by the Delaware County Engineer. Illustrations of approved mailbox supports and attachments are included with this policy as appendix A.

#### SECTION 4: SHOULDER AND PARKING AREA CONSTRUCTION

It shall be the responsibility of the postal patron to inform the Delaware County Secondary Road Department of any new or existing mailbox installations where shoulder construction is inadequate to provide all weather access to the mailbox.

#### SECTION 5: REMOVAL OF NONCONFORMING OR UNSAFE MAILBOXES

Any mailbox or mailbox support that is found to violate the intent of this regulation shall be removed by the postal patron upon notification by the Delaware County Secondary Road Department under procedures described in Section 319.13 which states:

*If the following constitute an immediate and dangerous hazard, ...placed or erected upon the right of way of any public highway shall without notice or liability in damages be removable and the costs thereof assessed against ... (t)he owner or person responsible for placement of all other obstructions.*

*Any such obstruction not constituting an immediate and dangerous hazard shall be removed without liability after forty-eight hour notice served in the same manner in which an original notice is served, or in writing by certified mail, or in any other manner reasonably calculated to apprise the person responsible for the obstruction that the obstruction will be removed at the expense of such person after the notice is given.*

*Such removal and assessment of cost in the case of primary roads shall be by the department and in the case of secondary roads by the board of supervisors.*

*Upon removal of the obstruction, the highway authority may immediately send a statement of the cost of removal to the person responsible for the obstruction. If within ten days after sending the statement the cost is not paid, the highway authority may institute proceeding in the district court system to collect the cost of removal.*

At the discretion of the County Engineer, based on an assessment of hazard to the public, the patron shall be granted not less than 24 hours and not more than twenty days to remove an unacceptable mailbox and its support. After the specified period has expired, the unacceptable mailbox will be removed by the Secondary Road Department at the postal patron's expense.

#### SECTION 6: MAILBOXES AND SNOW REMOVAL

Delaware County conducts winter snow removal operations under the terms of Delaware County Ordinance number 3 which establishes the policy and level of service in respect to the clearance of snow and ice during winter months. Section 3 of the ordinance addresses mailboxes and states the following:

*“The County will assume no liability for mailboxes and fences damaged because of snow removal unless such action can be determined to be malicious or by direct contact with a plow or wing blade. The County will not replace mailboxes damaged or knocked down by the force of snow thrown from the plow.”*

The county further does not remove accumulated snow from in front of, underneath, or near the location of the mailbox to accommodate the delivery of mail. It shall be the responsibility of the postal patron to remove snow which accumulates around the mailbox to accommodate mail delivery.

#### SECTION 7: PERMITS

As required by Section 319.14 of the Code of Iowa, rural residents planning to install a mailbox should obtain a permit to perform the work from the County Engineer. Permits are available at the address shown in Section 1 of this policy.

The attached mailbox installation policy is approved this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2003 by the Delaware County Board of Supervisors meeting in regular session.

FOR DELAWARE COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

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Bill Skinner, Chairman-Delaware County Board of Supervisors

ATTEST:

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Sharon McCrabb, Delaware County Auditor  
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RECOMMENDED:

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Mark J. Nahra, Delaware County Engineer