



# Mailing Lists

## Overview

A mailing list is a tool that contains contact information for interested parties. It is usually in an electronic format, such as an Excel spreadsheet or other database, and sortable by any field, including last name, organization, city, state, region, phone number, special interest, or other relevant factors. An organized and updated mailing list that encompasses the entire affected community at a Superfund site can be an important way to implement some of the activities included in the [community involvement plan](#) (CIP).

## Why This is Important

This activity is important because it enables you to identify and contact any or all members of the affected community easily and quickly with site-related information and announcements. An up-to-date mailing list contains current addresses (and sometimes other contact information) for all members of the affected community. Even if other dissemination methods, such as social media, may be preferred over mail, maintaining an accurate mailing list provides a resource containing the names and addresses of every household within a specified target area.

## Implementation

The mailing list of interested parties should be developed at the beginning of community involvement for a site. The more quickly that names and addresses can be combined into a formal list, the easier it will be to contact members of the affected community with a mass mailing or a targeted mailing. This tool is most effective when the mailing list is:

- organized in an electronic format that allows sorting by any field;
- based on current, verified, and standardized information;
- easily updated;
- expandable; and
- able to produce mailing labels or send group emails with ease.

Because mailing lists contain personally identifiable information (PII) and thus are subject to EPA's

*This and all tools in the Community Involvement Toolkit should be used in conjunction with the [Community Involvement Handbook](#), which provides guidance to EPA staff on how EPA typically plans and implements community involvement activities at Superfund sites.*

[Privacy Policy](#), this information should not be made public. (See box below.) Consult with the Office of Regional Counsel or Office of General Counsel before determining whether to disclose or withhold the information. A Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request may be required.

Mailing lists can be created using a word processing or spreadsheet software program (e.g., Microsoft (MS) Word, MS Excel). An Excel spreadsheet may be particularly useful, as it allows for the flexible sorting of information, and it can be used as a data source when preparing customized letters with the mail-merge function in MS Word. While you can create a new mailing list, it also may be possible to obtain an existing mailing list from a local government or public interest group, or to combine lists from several public interest groups or local governmental units. You also can purchase mailing lists from private-sector mailing list vendors or from a business center operated by the U.S. Postal Service (USPS). Mailing list information also can be obtained directly from attendees at public meetings or conferences.

Regardless of how you acquire the mailing list, you will need to carefully define the parameters of the geographical target area for which the list is created. You can use mapping software to narrow a search for specific addresses within a target area or radius, and then acquire names for selected addresses. You also may wish to identify particular groups of people (for example, families with small children, elderly residents, or non-English speaking residents) within the larger mailing list.

## Email Lists

Mailing lists that contain email addresses can be used for the distribution of information to many internet users at the same time. Be sure to check the email



### *Mailing Lists and Personally Identifiable Information*

Creating a mailing list entails the collection of non-sensitive personally identifiable information (PII), such as names and home addresses or home telephone numbers. Some community members may not be comfortable with the release of their personal information, so site mailing lists should not be released publicly or included as an appendix to the CIP.

General EPA policy regarding the collection and release of PII consists of the following:

- In general, sign-in sheets and mailing lists are subject to EPA's Privacy Policy. As a result, EPA staff typically should consult with the Office of Regional Counsel or Office of General Counsel before determining whether to disclose or withhold the information. A FOIA request may be required.
- If a FOIA request is received, it is possible that some personal information, such as names, could be released to the FOIA requestor. The personal privacy exemption under FOIA (exemption 6) may often apply, and after balancing the personal privacy interests against public interest, EPA may determine that some PII should not be released. Release of PII for FOIA requests is determined on a case-by-case basis, and EPA programs should consult with their FOIA office or counsel when making this determination.

To clarify the collection and release of PII for community members, please consider displaying the following disclaimer language on public sign-in sheets, public mailing lists, or any other time when PII is collected:

*The information you provide here is subject to EPA's Privacy Policy and may be disclosed consistent with federal laws and regulations, including under the Freedom of Information Act. EPA's Privacy Policy should not be confused with the Privacy Act, which generally does not cover sign-in sheets and mailing lists but may cover other collected information.*

*If collected information is subject to the [Privacy Act](#), please follow the procedures outlined in the system of records notice, including any requisite disclaimer language*

addresses in your list to make sure they follow a format for delivery (e.g., recipient@properdomain.com), otherwise, your emails will not be delivered.

Mailing lists can be as simple as a set of email addresses maintained as a "contact group" in your own mailing software (e.g., MS Outlook), to more formal listservs that require additional software platforms and allow for recipients to subscribe and unsubscribe. MS Word's merge function can be used to prepare customized emails for your recipients in HTML or plain text in the body of an email or as an MS Word attachment.

Third party marketing tools are available to assist you with updating and maintaining mailing lists. Check within your Region for approved tools, as approved software may change.

### **Mailing Lists for Sending Hard Copies**

If you plan to use your mailing list for sending hard copies of materials or customized letters, consider consulting the [USPS's Postal Explorer page](#), which

includes information on postal addressing standards and a variety of address information systems products and services.

Before you consider using a source outside the Agency for assistance with maintaining or creating a mailing list or sending a mailing, work with your Region's mail room, which will be familiar with regional mailing practices and requirements and may be able to assist you with mailings. The mail room also may have existing specifications for mailings and existing vendor relationships that you may be able to use.

If you decide to purchase mailing list services from an external vendor, a [U.S. Post Office Business Center](#) usually can provide a list of quality vendors. In general, look for vendors that:

- Update their databases quarterly (at least);
- Can provide a quality list quickly;
- Can narrow the list to exact geographic areas;
- Can provide electronic or hard-copy lists or label versions of the list;



- Can provide updates electronically (e.g., download them from a website); and
- Put their lists through the USPS's National Change of Address (NCOALink®) database, which helps keep the list up-to-date.

One service to explore is the USPS's [Every Door Direct Mail](#) (EDDM®) service, which includes a mapping tool to help you create direct mail campaigns targeting customers by age, income, or household size. You can choose your own marketing routes or contact the specialists from [USPS's list of vendors](#), which includes printers as well as a list of online direct marketing vendors.

There are some drawbacks to using external mailing services. The Regions are responsible for ensuring that they receive updates/corrections to the mailing list from the vendor or from returned mail, and a high rate of returned mail can be expected if the vendor does not frequently update the lists.

When a mailing is returned, conduct research to verify that the address is correct. If you are able to correct the address, add the updated address to your mailing list and resend the mailing, keeping in mind any dates listed on the mailing – there is no need to resend information for an event that has already occurred. If the address cannot be verified or is confirmed as undeliverable, remove the address from the mailing list.

Returned mailings should be expected any time you send hard copies through the mail, particularly with your first mailing. In order to ensure your mailing list is as accurate as possible, it is important to continu-

ously maintain and update your mailing lists. The following tips may be useful when creating or updating your mailing list.

- Add the recipient's name plus "or current resident" on the address label to lower the number of returns.
- Make sure all information provided on the sign-in sheets is legible.
- Remove duplicate records.

Issues that may affect the delivery of mail include:

- A missing unit or suite number.
- The address is not listed on the mailbox.
- The mailbox is locked.

Please keep in mind that due to federal printing regulations, any document that is between 5,000 and 25,000 pages should be sent to your mailing list recipients via the Government Printing Office. Documents exceeding 25,000 pages cannot be sent without prior authority of the Central Printing and Publications Management Organization.<sup>1</sup>

### Collecting Phone Numbers

Collecting and storing phone numbers in the mailing list can be useful in the event that a message needs to reach the community quickly. If a majority of the community consists of cell phone users, text messages can be used to provide immediate updates to the community. Keep in mind that data rates may apply when sending and receiving text messages.

<sup>1</sup> Government Printing and Binding Regulations, retrieved from <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-CPUB-101spub9/html/GPO-CPUB-101spub9.htm>