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Deadlines approach to mail absentee voting ballots, gifts for holidays

FORT KNOX, Ky. – Tuesday is the second of several deadlines set by the U.S. Postal Service for DoD service members and employees to mail absentee voting ballots to their respective states.

Deadlines fall on Oct. 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25 and 26 depending upon world locations. The first deadline for more than 50 Naval ships worldwide was Oct. 8.

A spokesman for the Military Postal Service Agency (MPSA) operations department headquarters in Alexandria, Va., further explained:

“The Military Overseas Voter Empowerment Act (MOVE Act) requires absentee ballots to be mailed from overseas military post offices no later than seven days prior to the election date of Nov. 2 in order to reach election offices in time to be counted,” said Chief Warrant Officer James Clark.

“Postal activities in each MACOM [major command] identified locations with infrequent mail dispatching and/or transportation support then determined the number of additional days [to the mandated seven] it would take for ballots to be delivered in time for the election.”

Local commands working with MPSA have communicated the information to voters about recommended mailing dates to ensure ballots arrive before Nov. 2, he explained.

Master Sgt. Grace Johnson, who has worked with the MPSA in Alexandria for two-and-a-half years, said the biggest change is that employees can track ballots from their original location to final voting destination. “We track by express label number, not by mail, which is how we used to do it,” Johnson said.

She is the postal voting manager for the MPSA. “As of [Oct. 12], we had 55,068 ballots dispatched and 12,905 received and post marked in the mail stream to the United States to be

added to the collection,” she said. The number of ballots received varies depending upon how many service members are stationed in what countries, world events and other things, she said.

On the note of deadlines, in less than a week, friends and family need to start mailing gifts to DoD service members and civilians stationed outside the continental United States in order to make it by respective holidays, according to recent articles written about this topic.

Hanukkah begins Dec. 1 this year, so gifts must go in the mail by Oct. 19. A rough way to gauge when to mail items is to subtract 24 days from each holiday. That is the latest date to mail.

Deadlines include: Space Available Mail (SAM): Nov. 20 to contingency locations, such as Army Post Office (APO) and Fleet Post Office (FPO) and certain country codes with zip codes beginning with 093XX; all other overseas military locations by Nov. 26; priority mail: Dec. 4 to contingency locations; all others by Dec. 10; express Mail Military Services: not available to contingency locations; other locations by Dec. 18. Always check with your local post office to determine if this service is available for a particular APO/FPO/DPO address.

Faye Slater, the deputy director of MPSA said deadlines and restrictions depend upon world locations and vary from each other. For a complete list of deadlines and banned items from the U.S. mail system visit the U.S. Postal Service website at: www.usps.com. For a list of restricted items that cannot be mailed to APO/FPOs/DPOs and certain country codes, see the FAQ link: <http://hqdainet.army.mil/mpsa/faqweb.pdf>.