

How to Stop Junk Mail

The average American adult receives almost 560 pieces of junk mail each year. One hundred million trees are ground up every year to produce the 4.5 million tons of solicitations that clutter our mailboxes.

Here is a checklist of actions to dramatically reduce the amount of junk mail you receive:

- **Stop getting credit card junk mail.** Most credit card companies use a central service to screen out people who don't want to receive their mailings. To avoid getting most credit card junk mail, call 888-567-8688. (You will be asked for your social security number.)
- **Stop junk mail before it starts.** Whenever you fill out a form or place an order, always write "Do not rent or exchange my name" or ask the order taker to please "flag your file" so that your information won't be shared.
- **Don't fill out product warranty cards.** A warranty is valid whether or not you return a card, and sending one in will put you on more mailing lists. Also avoid contests — another mechanism for compiling mailing lists.
- **Remove the paper from your monthly bills.** These bills are another opportunity for businesses to send you more junk. Sign up for automatic payment and ask companies to e-mail you a statement. It may take an hour or two to set this up, but you'll save time and stamps in the long run.
- **Cut the catalogs.** Most catalogs have an 800 number customers can use to place orders. Call and request that they remove your name from their list - and ask where they got your information, so you can call that business or organization and tell them to stop selling or trading your information.
- **Return "high-end" junk mail.** For First Class mail and mail marked "Address correction requested" or "Return postage guaranteed:" Ink out the barcode and write "Return to Sender - Refused by Addressee" on the front (this is the correct instruction for the U.S. Postal Service). You can also write "Please remove my name from your mailing list" on the envelope so the sender knows why you're returning it.
- **Call or write bulk mailers.** The sender of this mail paid a lower postage rate, so the USPS will not return undeliverable or unwanted mail to them. Open the envelope and look for an 800 number or a Business Reply envelope, and then call or write back to them and ask to be removed from their list. If you're writing, enclose the label with your name on it — these often contain codes that will make it easier for mailers to locate and delete your file.
- **Stop previous resident mail.** Mail addressed to a previous occupant of your house or apartment: If it is first class or "address correction requested mail", write "Return to Sender: Moved, Left no Address" on the envelope, cross out the barcode, and drop it back in the mail. If it is bulk mail, call or use a business reply envelope to tell the sender that the addressee has moved.
- **Say "no" to flyers and advertising supplements.** These are addressed to "Resident", and your address will appear on a separate postcard (usually featuring pictures of missing children) that accompanies the ad. The name of the company responsible for these mailings will be printed in the bulk mail seal on the upper right corner of the card. Contact this company - their information may appear on the card, but if it doesn't you can consult your phone book - and ask to be removed from their distribution list. It may take a few weeks before your request takes effect, and you may have to notify the company more than once.