

By Jan Rahn

Tribune Staff

Those who didn't buy an abundant supply of 'Forever Stamps' around the holidays may regret it as the end of January approaches.

Effective Jan. 26, the postage rate for a first-class stamp is taking a three cent jump from 46 cents to 49 cents. A book of first-class, one-ounce stamps will cost \$9.80.

Those fortunate to have a lot of Forever Stamps on hand will still be able to use them.

The rate increase is predicted to recoup losses suffered in 2008 and 2011 by boosting the U.S. Postal Service revenue by \$2.8 billion in two years.

According to the chair of U.S. Postal Service board of directors, Mickey Barnett, increasing postage prices is a last resort that reflects extreme financial challenges.

The postal service is encouraged by recent introduction of comprehensive postal reform legislation in Congress, said Barnett. Postal officials hope that the legislation will be enacted this year.

The last time postage took a one cent jump was on Jan. 27, 2013.

The last time there was a three-cent hike when stamps went from 34 cents to 37 cents was in 2002.

Stamp prices have stayed consistent with the average annual rate of inflation of 4.2 percent since the Postal Service was formed in 1971.

Other Increases

- The USPS has introduced a new First Class letter rate for the "Metered Mail" category, which includes online postage providers and postage meters. This new rate would be 48 cents, one cent below the retail rate of 49 cents for first class letters.
 - First Class Flats (1 ounce) will increase by six cents to 98 cents from 92 cents. Each additional ounce will cost an extra 21 cents, which is up one cent from 2013.
 - Postcard rates will increase by one cent to 34 cents from 33 cents.
 - Priority Mail Commercial Base (online postage) rates will continue to start at \$5.05, and in some weight ranges and zones, the prices will be reduced compared to 2013.
 - Priority Mail Express Commercial Base (online postage) rates will increase by an average of 3 percent and will start at \$18.95 (previously at \$13.09).
 - First Class Package Service will see an average increase of 5 percent in 2014.
 - New Priority Mail International's maximum weight for Rate Group 2 (Mexico) has been increased to 70 pounds from 44 pounds.
 - New Commercial Plus Pricing—the minimum annual package volume threshold for cubic pricing and other Commercial Plus offerings—will be lowered to 50,000 packages.
- For more information, visit the post office online at www.USPS.com.

New postage prices

Letters (1 oz.) — 3-cent increase to 49 cents

Letters additional ounces — 1-cent increase to 21 cents

Letters to all international destinations (1 oz.) — \$1.15

Postcards — 1-cent increase to 34 cents