



CLUSTER MAILBOX MAINTENANCE AND REPLACEMENT

By: David L. May, Jr., AIA

As of August 2003 the policy regarding both the installation and maintenance of cluster mailboxes was changed. In the past, the post office (USPS) policy was to purchase and maintain cluster mailboxes at strategic locations around the community. The Hampton Roads regional Postmaster says that they will continue to maintain those cluster boxes installed prior to August 2003. However, the post office will not pay for, nor install any new cluster boxes. And they will only replace those cluster mailboxes installed prior to August 2003 if needed. This is covered in the USPS manual "2.1.3 Customer Maintenance of Receptacles - *Customers must provide authorized mail receptacles or door slots, except for mail receptacles authorized by the USPS to be owned and maintained by the USPS. The purchase, installation, maintenance, and replacement of mail receptacles used by customers for mail delivery are not the responsibility of the USPS.*"

It is important to remember that the Associations at this time have no investment in or responsibility for the cluster boxes that were in place prior to August, 2003. If your cluster box was installed after August 2003 however, the Association is now responsible for its maintenance and replacement as a result of this decision. While there is no indication that they will do so, it is possible that the USPS may at some date decide not to maintain any cluster boxes in any Association.

To replace their cluster mailboxes at the end of their useful life, the Association has to contact the local postmaster and get permission. The replacement boxes have to be considered "acceptable" and manufactured within the parameters set up by the USPS. The association will have to pay the approximate \$1,500 or more cost of replacing a cluster mailbox. Because this change in policy is so different from the past policy, many associations are only now becoming aware of their responsibility to add funds to their replacement reserve to cover this common component. You will need to determine the installation date, so your reserve study preparer can determine if it should be included in your reserve study.

For developers of new Associations this decision is even more critical. "It is unclear who will buy the cluster box units (CBUs) and who will provide the land," said NAHB Regulatory Counsel A.J. Holliday. "USPS used to provide CBUs, but now the expectation seems to be that the developer will provide the land and buy the CBUs, and they will be placed wherever USPS decides, after whatever consultation it declares to be adequate. Parking and lighting at CBUs may be assigned in a similar way. Since lighting is a continuing cost, like mowing and other maintenance, developer-provided CBUs may require formation of a home owners association that can assess the households to pay for these costs."