



By Carolyn Lee

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Imperial Post Office Postmaster Jerry Lines isn't sure how many cards, letters and packages were mailed out of the office Monday, but it was expected to be the busiest day of the year.

The Imperial Post Office received 355 parcels, more than double the usual amount, he said, and probably sent out 400 parcels.

Lines estimated that 4,000 first class letters were mailed out, while about 5,000 were taken in. More than 650 million cards, letters and packages were expected nationwide.

Lines advises those with packages still to mail before Christmas to do so before 10 a.m. or after 2 p.m. during the week.

Those looking to avoid the crowds and save some time and money are encouraged to ship from home for the holidays at usps.com, where prices are up to 16 percent lower than at post offices. Customers shipping online receive free delivery confirmation, which is a 75-cent value, and free package pickup.

Postal officials recommend using Priority Mail Flat Rate boxes, which take the weight out of shipping. The boxes are free and come in a variety of sizes.

The Postal Service expects to deliver 365 million packages this Christmas season—a 20 percent increase over last year. Overall, the Postal Service projects to handle nearly 18 billion cards, packages and letters between Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve. Dec. 19 and 20 are expected to be the busiest delivery days of the year.

In order for mail and packages to arrive at their destination by Dec. 25, the Postal Service recommends that domestic first-class mail be sent by Dec. 20, domestic priority mail by Dec. 21 and domestic express mail by Dec. 22.

Tips for holiday mailing, shipping

Confirm addresses. Print addresses clearly and be sure to include all address elements. Include both "to" and "from" information. If a zip code isn't known, visit usps.com to find it.

Choose the right box. Select a strong box with room for cushioning inside. Don't reuse mailing boxes, as they weaken during shipping.

Pack delicately. Cushion contents with shredded or rolled newspaper, bubble wrap, popped popcorn or foam peanuts. Always use tape that is designed for shipping. Do not use wrapping paper, string, masking tape, duct tape or cellophane tape.