



## 2011 FAQs

# OPERATION SANTA / LETTERS TO SANTA PROGRAM

### 1. How long has the Post Office been receiving and responding to letters to Santa?

Officially, almost 100 years, but the Postal Service began receiving letters to Santa Claus many years before then.

In 1912, Postmaster General Frank Hitchcock authorized local postmasters to allow postal employees and citizens to respond to the letters in the program — this became known as Operation Santa.

In the 1940s, mail volume for Santa increased so much that the Postal Service invited charitable organizations and corporations to participate — providing written responses and small gifts.

Through the years, the program has taken on a life of its own. Today, cities around the country have extremely successful programs with recognized charitable organizations, major corporations, local businesses and postal employees making a major difference in the lives of children from coast to coast.

### 2. What's so special about New York City's "Operation Santa?"

It is the largest in the country but joins other vibrant programs throughout the U.S. such as in Los Angeles, CA, and Chicago, IL.

New York kicks off or opens their program to the public with a ceremony during the first week of December. During December, tens of thousands of people visit the post office to adopt the more than 500,000 letters generally received at this location alone.

### 3. How does the Operation Santa / Letters to Santa program work?

Thousands of children of all ages send letters to "Santa Claus, North Pole, Alaska" every year.

Unless these letters contain a complete Alaska address, they remain in the area from where they were mailed.

"Postal Elves" go through the letters and sort out those that wish Santa a happy birthday from those that express serious need.

Local individuals and organizations "adopt" the letters, by purchasing the gifts requested in the letter and having USPS ship the items to the child's home. (The individuals and organizations never have access to the requesting child's personal information such as last name or address.)

### 4. How many letters to Santa does the Postal Service receive every year?

It's difficult to know an exact figure, but we believe it's easily in the millions.

## **5. Is every Post Office mandated to participate in the program?**

No. However, most major metropolitan areas have active programs. If an office participates, there is a standard operating procedure that must be followed to ensure the safety and privacy of the children involved.

## **6. Why is there an elaborate set of guidelines and procedures relating to this program?**

Unfortunately, we live in an age where we just can't be too careful — especially in regard to children. First and foremost, our goal is to protect the safety and privacy of children and their families. The national postal guidelines for Letters for Santa were first established in 2006.

## **7. What is the goal of the program?**

Our goals are simple — to continue to match deserving children with organizations and individuals that have a sincere desire to fulfill the needs of children and families around the nation during the holiday season.

## **8. What is the process/procedure in place to protect the privacy of the participants?**

In 2006, the following national policies and procedures, which apply to the selection and response to letters to Santa, were created and disseminated nationwide. In New York City, very little had to change to comply, as the Post Office here had already been requesting this type of information for many years.

1. Requests for Letters to Santa must be made in person at a participating local post office (not by phone or fax).
2. Individuals must present valid photo identification to view letters.
3. Individuals must fill out a form that has their name and address, and the list of Santa letters being selected.
4. Organizations such as charities, businesses, corporations, schools, etc., wishing to select letters must complete appropriate forms as well.
5. With the exception of first names, ages, and genders, personal data such as last name, physical and email addresses, locations and school names are removed before a copy may be given to individuals and organizations.

