



Tools for Opening Recreation Site Fee Envelopes

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Recreation Site Fee Deposit Envelopes

Throughout the Forest Service, during a typical field season, many hundreds of recreation site fee deposit envelopes are opened daily by Forest Service compliance officers. This task can be tedious for those who manage large recreation areas. While the reservation system has reduced the need for self-service fee collection systems at some high-use sites, many remote recreation areas still use self-service collection systems. This Tech Tips provides information on tools available to expedite the opening of the fee deposit envelope.

The fee deposit envelope—form FS-2300-26 (3/88)—measures 3-5/8 by 6-1/2 inches. The Forest Service recently converted to this size because it is a trade standard. This makes it less expensive for printing contractors to manufacture our collection envelopes, and provides increased competition and lower bid prices per envelope over previously supplied custom-designed envelopes. Visitors to sites requiring a users' fee follow posted directions and deposit the fee within the envelope, seal it shut, and place the envelope in the designated deposit box.

Opening the Envelopes

A market search was conducted by San Dimas Technology and Development Center (SDTDC) personnel to explore tools and/or techniques that would make opening the envelope easier and more efficient. Only two practical solutions to assist in expediting the rapid opening of envelopes were discovered; that is, either modify the envelope or acquire a special tool for opening the sealed envelope.

Envelope Modifications

Major envelope manufacturers were contacted to determine costs associated with providing pull-tab, strings, or other special opening features. It was found

that these features are not readily available on small dimension envelopes, and there is significant additional costs associated in providing such features.

Opening Tools

Only two categories of tools to open envelopes exist: (1) hand-operated, unmechanized letter openers and (2) mechanical (electric) letter openers.

HAND-OPERATED LETTER OPENERS—The more commonly used tool, this type of opener is typically referred to as a "stiletto" or knife-style letter opener (see figure 1). This tool is readily available



Figure 1. Stiletto letter opener.

through General Services Administration (GSA) supply at a cost of \$0.28 (open market retail price is \$1.20). Another tool available is the "Presto" letter opener, distributed by Keene Manufacturing, Inc. Retail price for this device is \$1.69; it is not available through GSA supply (see figure 2).





Figure 2. Presto letter opener.

Stiletos vs. Presto letter opener. The average person is able to open 9 to 14 fee envelopes per minute using a stiletto tool, based on actual timed studies conducted by the author. Comparative studies using the Presto tool achieved an additional opening of one to two envelopes. Though not a significant increase, the Presto opener can reduce fatigue during long repetitious periods of envelope opening. This characteristic was supported by favorable comments from the majority of those participating in the study; they preferred using the Presto tool over the traditional stiletto. (NOTE: There were some participants who still preferred using their favorite stiletto-style opener.)

MECHANICAL (ELECTRIC) LETTER OPENERS (fig. 3).—A standard item in some business offices, this mechanical tool provides rapid opening of bulk mail. This type of opener shears off a narrow strip (usually 1/8-in-wide) along the edge of the envelope. The comments

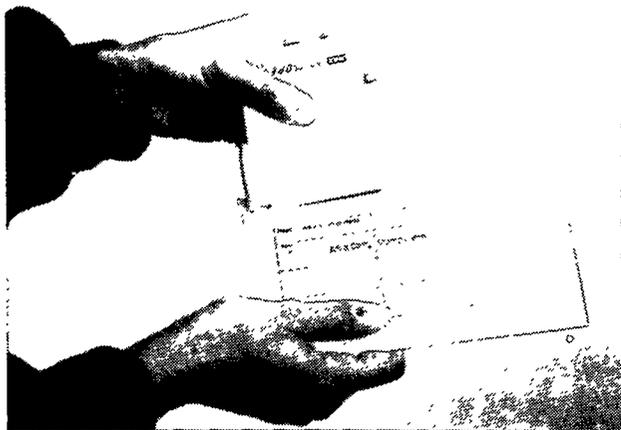


Figure 3. Max—a portable, battery-operated opener.

by people who have used this type of opener suggest that there is a significant increase in efficiency in opening envelopes, but an equal amount of time can be spent mending together important documents (including checks and currency) accidentally sheared. The typical desktop machine costs \$160. However, a portable, hand-held, battery-operated unit is available through the GSA supply schedule for \$14.50. This type of opener can open as many as 60 business envelopes per minute.

Conclusions

Hand-operated letter openers appear to be a very practical and economical tool for opening sealed fee envelopes. The Presto opener did demonstrate a slight advantage over the stiletto opener. Envelopes manufactured with the sealant applied too close or spread along a wide strip near the edge of the envelope closure will restrict the insertion of any hand-operated tool, thus requiring more time and effort for the person attempting to open the envelope.

The portable, battery-operated opener can add to the ease of envelope opening, especially for people with disabilities. The operator of this tool must use caution to ensure that the contents of the envelope are away from the edge to be sheared. The operator can accomplish this by tapping the envelope on a hard surface prior to inserting the envelope through the opener.

Mechanical-type openers demonstrate their greatest usefulness when opening envelopes of equal dimensions and uniform contents. The cutting blade will eventually wear at a rate dependant on the envelope's size and stock. According to the distributor of the Max opener, the model EN-10's non-replaceable blades should last through 33,000 openings.

ORDERING INFORMATION

Stiletto Letter Opener

Knife-style opener with sharp point and 6-in blade; offset handle allows easy pickup; made of heavy-gauge, corrosion-resistant plated steel; overall length is 9 inches.

Available through GSA Customer Supply Center
7520-00-240-4841.....EA \$0.28

Presto Letter Opener

Compact, hand-held, plastic letter opener from Keene Mfg; has concealed metal blade; available in assorted colors; length is 2-1/2 inches.

ESP Company
P.O. Box 440901
Miami, FL 33114
305/448-2420

Price (retail).....EA \$1.69 (Dscts avail. on lg. quantity orders.)

Battery-operated, Mechanical Opener

Compact, lightweight, hand-held opener mfg. by Max Business Machines, model EN-10; requires 4 AA batteries; total weight (inclgd. batteries) is 8 ounces; available in black or white.

GSA New Item Introductory Schedule (NIIS)
Contract Number: GS-02F-4041A
Contract Period: 1/31/91 through 1/30/94
Charlotte's Office Boutique
8814 West Greenwood Road
Spokane, WA 99204
800/289-4456

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