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B-140697, Oct. 28, 1959

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B-140697, OCT. 28, 1959

TO THE POSTMASTER GENERAL:

IN A LETTER OF SEPTEMBER 4, 1959, THE HONORABLE EDSON O. SESSIONS, AS ACTING POSTMASTER GENERAL, REQUESTED OUR APPROVAL FOR THE USE OF FACSIMILE SIGNATURES IN THE EXECUTION OF CONTRACTS BY REGIONAL VEHICLE MANAGERS OF THE POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT. ATTACHED TO THE LETTER WAS AFILE INDICATING THE TYPES AND STANDARD FORMS OF THE CONTRACTS INVOLVED.

THE ACTING POSTMASTER GENERAL STATED:

"THE VEHICLE MANAGERS ARE THE AUTHORIZED CONTRACTING OFFICERS FOR VEHICLE SERVICE AND ORDINARILY CONTRACTS OF THE NATURE HERE INVOLVED ARE ACCOMPLISHED BY HAND WRITTEN SIGNATURES. HOWEVER, SINCE THE NUMBER OF CONTRACTS INVOLVED IN A SINGLE REGION REQUIRES UPWARDS OF 21,000 SIGNATURES, THE NEED FOR ADOPTION OF AN ALTERNATE MEANS, IF OTHERWISE PROPER, BECOMES APPARENT.

"IT IS INTENDED THAT THE POST OFFICE WILL AUTHORIZE USE OF APPROPRIATE FACSIMILE SIGNATURES IN SPECIFIC CASES AND ONLY WHERE JUSTIFIED BY THE VOLUME OF DOCUMENTS AND THAT A SIGNATURE REPRODUCED BY AN AUTHORIZED SIGNATURE PLATE OR RUBBER STAMP WILL IMPOSE THE SAME LIABILITY UPON AN OFFICER AS HIS AUTOGRAPHIC SIGNATURE.'

YOU ARE ADVISED WE WOULD HAVE NO OBJECTION TO THE DEPARTMENT'S AUTHORIZATION OF THE USE OF FACSIMILE SIGNATURES BY REGIONAL VEHICLE MANAGERS WHERE WARRANTED, PROVIDED THERE ARE MAINTAINED CONTROLS AND PROCEDURES ADEQUATE TO PROTECT THE INTERESTS OF THE GOVERNMENT AND PREVENT THE MISUSE OF SUCH SIGNATURES. WE BELIEVE THE DEPARTMENT INCIDENT TO AUTHORIZING THE USE OF FACSIMILE SIGNATURES SHOULD, AMONG OTHER THINGS, ESTABLISH STANDARDS FOR THE AUTHORIZATION OF THE USE OF FACSIMILE SIGNATURES; ENUMERATE THE TYPES OF CONTRACTS TO WHICH FACSIMILE SIGNATURES MAY BE AFFIXED; ADVISE THE REGIONAL MANAGERS AUTHORIZED TO USE FACSIMILE SIGNATURES THAT THEIR RESPONSIBILITY AND LIABILITY ARE NOT LESSENED BY THE AFFIXING OF A FACSIMILE SIGNATURE INSTEAD OF AN AUTOGRAPHIC SIGNATURE TO A DOCUMENT, AND PROVIDE FOR THE PHYSICAL CONTROL OF THE SIGNATURE DEVICE TO PREVENT ITS UNAUTHORIZED USE. FURTHERMORE, WE WOULD SUGGEST FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION THE ADVISABILITY OF RESTRICTING THE USE OF FACSIMILE SIGNATURES TO CONTRACT COPIES, REQUIRING THE ORIGINAL, WHICH IS KEPT IN THE REGIONAL COMPTROLLER'S OFFICE, TO BE MANUALLY SIGNED. THE NUMBER OF HAND WRITTEN SIGNATURES WOULD THEREBY BE REDUCED APPRECIABLY AND THE BENEFITS OF THE AUTOGRAPHIC SIGNATURE RETAINED.