

SHIP SHIP HOORAY!

PACKING & SHIPPING ESSENTIALS

By AGWire™
March 5, 2016



If you're like many of us, you buy and sell occasionally on eBay. And every time you ship a package with valuable 'goods' in it, you're likely sitting on pins and needles until you finally hear from the recipient that it arrived safely and undamaged. The same thoughts and fears play on your mind while awaiting receipt of packages after a purchase. Sure, there can be shipping delays related to weather or holiday demand. But we've heard many horror stories of packages having gone missing or packages that have been tampered with and arrive *empty*, without any content. Ironically, most of these instances occur within the control and supervision of the shipping company, whether it's USPS, FedEx, or another postal service.

We had an unfortunate experience about eight years ago that involved an eBay sale of a 100oz Engelhard extruded silver bar. The winner buyer paid us with good funds and the item shipped via USPS Flat Rate Small Box with \$2000 insurance, the value at that time. The tracking number logged acceptance at our USPS office, but mysteriously went off the radar from there and was never found. After two weeks of unsuccessful pursuit, we issued a full refund to our buyer and pursued collection of our \$2000 USPS insurance claim. Long story short, after SIX (6) months of phone calls, letters, forms and even a mandated \$75 appraisal of the lost bar, which ironically showed a value of \$2000, the USPS sent us a check for \$112.75! They stated it was their sole and final offer, which reflected their definitive and conclusive value for the item. Our \$2000 USPS insurance policy was basically worthless. They lost a 100oz Engelhard bar within their system with no recovery, no recompense and, amazingly, no sympathy.

The lesson we learned from this experience is this -- 'Insurance' on a package only broadcasts to EVERYONE within a delivery chain that something valuable is in the box. As such, the 'temptation factor' will naturally foster a higher likelihood of loss. And, if you do experience a loss, USPS will determine in their sole and absolute discretion the value of your item IN THEIR OPINION, regardless of any documented amount of actual value or of the amount of insurance you paid for. It almost makes you wonder if JP Morgan is involved in this scam too!

So, after the battle scars of lessons learned, and thankfully years of successful shipping, we want to drive home the shipping and packing ideals that we all really should already know but sometimes overlook due to complacency. We recommend the following packing and shipping tips:

Packing the goods – this goes for anything greater than 5oz. Pack your item(s) in a small box within a large box. Had we shipped our 100oz extruded bar in a small box padded inside of a medium flat rate box, chances are that it would have arrived safely. Fully pad and pack your item(s) in the small box, each item individually wrapped and well-insulated to prevent metallic sounds. Then, make sure the small box is fully packed and suspended within the larger box so the finished box feels solid and well

balanced. Make sure there is absolutely no indication of anything heavy or rare or LOOSE inside. Next, use steel tape or 3M clear tape for all of the edges. Both work great and are hard to tamper with. A methodical tape job will deter any internal thieves, leaving them to focus on poorly wrapped targets. PLEASE DON'T USE ½" SCOTCH TAPE. Ok, good. So your package is done and ready to ship. If the weight seems too heavy (400-500oz) for one package, split the weight between two packages to mitigate your risk. Although it may cost you a few dollars more, the packages will be lighter, more balanced and less tempting. Your only goal is to get it safely to the recipient.

For 1-4oz, we recommend either a padded First Class pouch with the item taped tightly between two hard cardboard outer pieces so the package is flat and solid, or the item padded heavily within a USPS Priority Mail Flat Rate Small Box. No insurance would be needed due to the light weight and unassuming presentation, provided that all edges are taped tightly.

Next is your selection of typical shipping methods -- USPS First Class, USPS Priority Flat Rate Box (small, medium or large), USPS Registered, UPS Ground, FedEx Ground, FedEx Overnight and FedEx 2 day. Our favorite shipping option for more valuable items is the 'Registered' USPS Priority Mail Flat Rate Box. It's a bit more costly than standard Priority Mail and takes the clerk longer to 'wet tape' all edges, but if your goal is to send a valuable package with the highest degree of tracking and security, you'll really want to consider sending it 'Registered' mail. Our second favorite shipping option has been USPS Priority Mail Flat Rate Box with NO INSURANCE but WITH Signature Confirmation. No additional attention is drawn from Signature Confirmation, the cost is very reasonable, and the package typically arrives on time and without issue. We've also had good success with FedEx overnight and FedEx 2-day, although these methods are quite a bit more costly than USPS. NEVER have your items packed and shipped by a local 'postal services store' unless you know and trust the owners implicitly. We've heard stories of elderly collectors bringing their gold bars or Silver Eagles in to a postal store to pack and ship to an eBay buyer, only to find that the items either never arrived with the recipient, or the recipient received 'red bricks' in a box after the goods were somehow 'swapped' during transfer.

If sellers don't remain proactive and vigilant to protect themselves and their buyers, these things will likely happen. We recognize that most collectors already know this stuff but it's something we all need to be more and more aware of and concerned with, especially as the value of our precious metal holdings increase over time. **This article is much in the same light as our Storage article of a few weeks ago.** Not unlike storing your bullion, packages being shipped should appear and feel generic and unassuming, and should not bring about any curiosity as to what is inside. That means no loose bars in a box, no jingling metal sounds, just a solid, balanced and well-taped package. Our hobby is a great one, but getting burned because of innocent mistakes can be extremely disheartening. Don't let thieves spoil your fun. Next time your Bulls ship, avoid the bullship and pack with caution in mind, and show some pride and respect for what you are packing. You'll celebrate a successful delivery by staying one step ahead of the thieves, because you're smarter than them, your nicer than them, and doggone it, people like you!

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