# U.S. Postal Service falling short of targets in major opioids law

Sen. Rob Portman demands progress in getting data, IDing fentanyl

By [Tom Howell Jr.](https://www.washingtontimes.com/staff/tom-howell-jr/) *- The Washington Times - Thursday, April 4, 2019*

The [U.S. Postal Service](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/us-postal-service/) has failed to meet a major benchmark in the fight against opioids, with millions of packages from [China](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/china/) still not being cataloged in the hunt for deadly drugs, a key senator said Thursday.

Sen. Rob Portman, Ohio Republican, said the post office must step up to meet the requirements of a new law that it must collect advance electronic data on 100% of packages from [China](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/china/) and 70% of the overall international mail.

Instead, data was collected on 76% of packages from [China](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/china/) and 57% of overall international mail as of January.

The goals were set by last year’s STOP Act, a bipartisan law intended to give U.S. Customs and Border Protection a heads up on incoming packages, leaving screeners a chance to try to spot suspicious patterns and intercept parcels that may contain illicit fentanyl from clandestine labs overseas.

Mr. Portman, chairman of the Senate’s chief investigative subcommittee, and Sen. Tom Carper, Delaware Democrat, said the failures to meet the legal deadlines were “unacceptable vulnerabilities.”

They demanded regular updates on progress in a letter to U.S. Postmaster General Megan Brennan and CBP Commissioner Kevin McAleenan.

The law’s targets for data collection will get stiffer, with the expectation that electronic data will arrive before every foreign package by the close of next year.

The postal service and CBP say they are already getting tough, warning [China](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/china/) that unless it makes progress, any shipment without the heads-up data “may be returned at any time.”

“In addition, CBP has notified air and ocean carriers to communicate with postal officials in the People’s Republic of China to confirm that 100% of the containers with postal shipments contain [the data] before loading them onto their conveyance,” the agency said.

As Congress debated the STOP Act, officials testified that procuring the data is harder than it looks because of complex treaties that govern international mail delivery.

Some countries don’t have the sophistication to provide the electronic data, while others are providing more data but not moving as fast as the U.S. would like.

But imposing consequences such as rejecting mail outright could result in retaliation by other countries.

Mr. Portman and Congress said too many people are dying from fentanyl in their communities, so drastic action was necessary.

They required the postal service, starting in 2021, to have a plan to reject shipments that don’t include the data after that point.

Fentanyl, a synthetic opioid said to be 50 times more powerful than heroin, has become the top killer in the drug-overdose crisis. Much of it is made in [China](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/china/) and arrives through the mail or trafficking routes through the southern border.

“We know how opioids are getting into this country and we know where the drugs are coming from,” Mr. Portman and Mr. Carper wrote in their letter. “Efficient, effective and secure operations at the major mail facilities that process inbound international mail are critical in stemming the flow of this poison.”

Chinese officials recently said they will follow through on a pledge to Mr. Trump and schedule all forms of the drug as an illegal substance.

A bipartisan group of senators introduced sanctions legislation Thursday designed to hold [China](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/china/) to its commitment and punish bad actors who skirt the rules.

“We cannot rely on the word of [China](https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/china/),” said Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer.

The legislation prods the U.S. government to identify makers of fentanyl, release their names and impose financial penalties. That could include freezing the assets of major Chinese chemical and pharmaceutical companies, or denying them access to U.S. markets.

“We’re not talking about someone making drugs in their kitchen,” Mr. Schumer said.