pallet dimensions, pallet load integrity, stacking, and minimum/maximum loads and heights. The Postal Service will consider individual shipments that are presented for acceptance under the plant-verified drop shipment (PVDS) program at a destination entry postal facility to be bedloaded if the load integrity of the pallets or the safety of postal employees is compromised. Such loads might require driver unloading or may be refused by the destination facility. If a shipment is refused, the mailer or mailer's agent who is presenting the mail for acceptance at the destination entry facility has the option to rework the mail off-site to match its original preparation as verified, then resubmit it with the appropriate documentation when the entry facility can reschedule the shipment.

The Postal Service will monitor load integrity of customers' pallets at mailers plants when mail is verified by on-site postal personnel and at postal facilities where mailings are entered, whether at business mail entry units under local verification and acceptance or a destination entry facilities where mailings are drop shipped under programs such as PVDS. The Postal Service may initially notify the transportation company presenting mail to the Postal Service for acceptance or the mail preparer, or both, when pallet load integrity problems are identified. The failure of pallet loads to maintain their integrity might be caused by poor preparation methods of the mailer (for example, the load exceeds maximum weight or height limits or the load is not secured to the pallet) or the improper loading and security of pallets onto the transportation used to move pallet loads to postal facilities for acceptance (for example, pallets are not secured with shoring equipment in vehicles to prevent pallets from toppling in transit, or heavier pallets are stacked onto lighter pallets and crush the mail on the bottom).

After a mailer is notified of recurring pallet load integrity problems and allowed to make changes to improve load integrity, if the mailer's methods still do not work, the mailer will be considered nonconforming and required to meet the specifications developed by Postal Service Engineering for securing pallets, pallet box construction and dimensions, stacking of pallets, maximum height/layers of trays, and use of top caps. These specifications are included in the DMM language at the end of this discussion of comments. Mailers whose pallets continue to fail to meet minimum load integrity levels will be suspended from the pallet program.

Three comments were received from two commenters concerning load integrity. One commenter wanted to know how damaged loads will be handled, who will be notified, whether the mailer/agent will be allowed to rework the mail, and how presentation of damaged loads will affect drop shipment appointments. This commenter also noted that ''in our business, it is common to refuse loads that have not maintained their integrity. At that point, it is the shipper's or carrier's responsibility to see that the load is taken to an alternative site for reworking.'' This same commenter wanted clarification about who will determine whether pallets are properly prepared to meet load integrity standards, at what point a mailer will be considered nonconforming, and whether the mailer will have an option to pay a penalty or fine at destination to have nonconforming pallets accepted for time-sensitive mailings. The commenter also expressed concern about possible inconsistencies in the determinations by different facilities about whether a pallet load meets the load integrity standards. The second commenter wanted feedback from the Postal Service about pallet load integrity problems, starting with the mail preparer and proceeding to the owner. The Postal Service will initially contact the mailer or mailer agent (such as a transportation company) when load integrity problems are identified.

Training materials will be distributed to postal facilities that accept pallets from mailers to ensure consistent understanding and application of pallet load integrity guidelines and the procedures that apply when problems are identified. The Drop Shipment Appointment System (DSAS) will be used, where possible, to identify and track the mailers or their agents presenting problem pallet loads. The DSAS will also help to establish contact to ensure that corrective actions are taken to improve future load integrity. The Postal Service will also work with mailers to ensure that corrective actions are taken to prevent recurrence of problems and to provide training and other necessary tools that will communicate the responsibilities of all mailers or their agents who create or handle mail on pallets.

Over the next few months, the Postal Service will formulate clear, objective criteria to identify pallet load integrity problems and to establish consistent feedback mechanisms for notifying mailers or their agents when problems are identified. Until those details are developed, load integrity will be monitored at origin and destination

postal facilities as it is today, feedback will be provided to mailers, and mailers will be allowed to improve preparation methods for identified problems. However, during that interim, mailers will not be determined as nonconforming or suspended from the pallet program. Accordingly, the rules relating to nonconforming mailers and suspension will not take effect until July 1, 1996.

IV. Sleeving and Strapping of Trays

No comments were received about the proposal to require mailers to sleeve and strap trays of letter mail placed onto BMC, ASF, SDC, and mixed BMC pallets; the proposed standards are adopted in the final rule. These standards provide an incentive to prepare pallets to finer levels of sortation, allowing for greater cross-dock opportunities at the BMCs and significant relief for BMC operations heavily affected by unstrapped trays. In addition, this rule adopts the proposal to extend the current requirement to sleeve all trays that contain letter-size automation rate mail and that may be processed at a BMC/ASF or AMF/AMC (that is, mail that does not originate and destinate in the delivery area of the same SCF) to include trays containing nonautomation rate letter-size mail.

V. Maximum Pallet Load

One commenter requested clarification of how the proposed 2,200-pound maximum for pallets applies to stacked pallets. The proposal to set 2,200 pounds as the maximum weight for any single pallet and as the maximum total weight for stacked pallets presented to the Postal Service is adopted in the final rule. When the weight of a single pallet or a stack of pallets is calculated, the weight of the mail and any tare placed on the bottom pallet are included in the calculation.

The proposed maximum load for trays on pallets of 12 layers, not to exceed 2,200 pounds, is also adopted in the final rule.

VI. Minimum Pallet Load

For packages, parcels, and sacks on pallets, the final rule requires mailers who prepare mail on pallets to prepare a required level of pallet sortation when there are 500 pounds of mail for that destination (for example, for a 5-digit ZIP Code or an SCF). At their option, mailers may prepare pallets for any required or optional level of sortation when they prepare at least 250 pounds of mail for a destination.

Palletization of trays of letter-size mail is based on the number of layers. Mailers may prepare a pallet when they