

Chinese express delivery firms move to protect privacy

Chinese express delivery companies have taken a new measure to protect the privacy of customers, by using new parcel waybills that show partial information about the sender and the receiver.

A parcel waybill of SF Express only shows partial information.
[Photo/Chinanews.com]

On the parcel waybills, names, phone numbers and addresses are shown only partially, with signs such as “(^_^)” or “*” being used to take the place of some of the details. For example, only the last four digits of a phone number are shown.

However, a user of the Twitter-like Sina Weibo said the move had caused some trouble when identifying parcels. “How do I know which one is mine?”

Some couriers said there had been no cases of incorrect deliveries due to the new measure. “After all, only part of the phone number is hidden, and chances are slim that they happen to be the same.”

Moreover, couriers were able to see the full information of customers by scanning the waybill number, so it was not a time hassle, either.

Since a real-name rule was enforced in the express delivery sector in late 2015, discussions about privacy protection have been ongoing.

Liu Junhai, a business law professor at Renmin University of China, said full implementation of the real-name system required the sender’s information to be traceable and consumers’ privacy to be fully protected. The new parcel waybill was “a key technical means to balance the real-name system and personal privacy,” he said.

So far, China has not made such waybills compulsory, nor has it published any uniformed standard in this regard.

Shao Zhonglin, the former general-secretary of the China Express Association, said major express delivery companies had volunteered to take the measure to enhance the protection of consumers’ privacy.

According to Chinese law, those who leak citizens’ personal information could be sentenced to up to seven years in jail.

Zhao Xiaomin, an expert in the express delivery sector, said mass data leaks were not caused by couriers but attributable to loopholes in company security management. Express delivery companies were advised to work with security tech companies to better protect customers’ data.