

A successful mail call is not proof of delivery

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A contact form can display a success message even when the intended recipient has not received an email. The WordPress `wp_mail()` reference makes this distinction explicit: a true return value means the method processed the request without an error. It does not establish receipt. An interface that turns that result into “Delivered” claims more than the function knows.

Testing the application decision

The independent fixture behind this note uses a sandbox-only WordPress plugin and fictional message details. Its `pre_wp_mail` hook intercepts sending and supplies controlled outcomes. This makes it possible to inspect the application response to a true result, a false result, or an exception without contacting a real mailbox.

Before attempting mail, the handler records a request reference in the WordPress options table. A separate HTTP request with the same reference reuses its recorded result; conflicting content for that reference is rejected. Simulated failures are held for review instead of automatically retried. Blind retries after an uncertain result can create duplicate messages.

What the recorded run establishes

The September 8 local run recorded 16 passing checks on WordPress 7.1, PHP 8.3.33 and Playground SQLite. They cover request validation, repeated submissions, controlled mail outcomes and sandbox boundaries. The plugin file checked for this note matches the SHA-256 recorded with that run. These are results from the recorded run, not a new production test.

The test boundary matters

Because the hook short-circuits sending, these checks exercise neither SMTP transport nor inbox placement. A repeated-request check with one PHP worker also does not establish race safety across multiple workers. Separate requests establish persistence between those requests, not recovery after a host crash. The fixture must remain isolated; it is not a deployable customer contact-form plugin.

For a real repair, first reproduce the reported failure and identify which layer is failing. Verify the application result, then check the configured mail provider and coordinate receipt at an approved destination. Report each observation separately. “The function returned true” and “the destination received the message” are different findings.

Primary reference: [WordPress Developer Resources: wp_mail\(\)](#) (description and `pre_wp_mail` source), checked September 9, 2026.

Local evidence: [inquiry-wordpress-example/test-results/verification.json](#), recorded September 8, 2026, 11:58:21 UTC; matching plugin and test source available for review. No client results or external email delivery are claimed.