POP3 makes it possible for a workstation to access and download email messages from a server. One might imagine that the internal formats of the mailboxes would need to be standardized so any POP3 program can read mail from any mail server. However, there is not very much that is required by the international standards in terms of mailbox formatting.

Having reviewed Internet Standard RFC 1939 (Meyers, 19996), the memo recommends minimal standardization for the maildrop listings: “The positive response consists of “+OK” followed by a single space, the number of messages in the maildrop, a single space, and the size of the maildrop in octets. […] Minimal implementations should just end that line of the response with a CRLF pair.” Not only is the mailbox format sparse, the memo goes on to recommend AGAINST adding more information to the mailbox than the minimal requirement: “This memo STRONGLY discourages implementations from supplying additional information in the drop listing.”

To summarize, POP3 does have a format standard for mailboxes, but it is a truly a bare-bones format including a positive response, the number of messages, and the size of the mailbox.

References

Meyers, J. (1996). “Post Office Protocol - Version 3.” Retrieved from <http://tools.ietf.org/html/rfc1939>