



Are you left out in the dark?

With shorter daylight hours and later start times, letter carriers are once again dealing with delivering mail after dark, which means you may wind up working in the dark. This causes issues every year. So, what is safe? Safe depends on you and your route. There is no blanket policy regarding delivery after dark because the very core issue to contend with is whether a particular carrier on a particular route can *safely* make mail delivery. Bottom line: Each carrier must weigh their individual circumstances about the type of delivery to be carried (door-to-door walking, mounted, apartments, cluster boxes, etc.), their surroundings (unfamiliar, high crime, many steps and hills, etc.) and their past experiences with after-dark deliveries.

Arbitrators have ruled that darkness, in and of itself, is not unsafe. Darkness can contribute to an unsafe situation. For example: You are on a walking route, it is not well lighted, you trip over a crack in the sidewalk and, a few feet later, you stumble over something else. You may want to declare that swing as unsafe and move to the next swing. As you deliver on the next swing, the same rule applies. If it is well lighted, then deliver the mail. If you stumble due to poor lighting, then stop. Move to the next swing.

There are several things you can do to keep safe while delivering when it is dark. If you are on a walking route and it is not well lighted, then you don't cut across lawns. You want to walk where it is safest. This is normally the driveway and sidewalk. If the area is not well lighted, then you probably can not finger the mail while walking since you may not be able to see the addresses well enough. Additionally, if it is not well lighted, you cannot see where you are walking with your peripheral vision, so you actually need to watch where you walk.

One of the issues to keep in mind is that there is a difference between safe and inefficient. When carriers raise the issue of darkness with me, nine times out of 10 they bring up how much longer it takes to deliver when it is dark. The fact that the delivery might take longer due to dark-

ness is a decision management needs to make. You need to call and let management know you will be late and give an estimate of when you will be done.

You can have problems delivering on cluster box, dismount and mounted delivery routes due to darkness as well. If you have to turn on the overhead light to sort the mail for delivery, you may need to let your eyes adjust to the dark again before driving to the next box (safety). For a cluster box, there may not be enough light to sort the mail at the box; you may have to sort it at the truck and then head for the boxes to make the delivery (inefficient). Dismount delivery is very similar to a walking route in the respect that you may not be able to sort the mail while you walk to the box (safety).

With management's latest plan that everyone pivots, you may be delivering in the dark on a route with which you are not familiar. Everyone needs to case in the dog warning cards. It becomes more difficult to tell where the barking dog is when it is dark. You are the only one who can keep yourself safe.

If you choose to bring back mail, let your manager know. You will need to be able to defend the decision with specific safety problems on the territory for the mail you brought back. This article is not to supersede any past practices in your city or any local agreements. Several of our cities have agreements regarding delivery cutoffs.

It is important to note it is not the intent of any carrier nor this office to endorse or encourage the unnecessary curtailment of any mail. It is about each carrier's safety and the protection of the mail in our charge and management's responsibility to manage. This is also not a blanket policy or approach. Very simply, it is the responsibility of each carrier to measure their safety and report to their supervisor any unsafe conditions they encounter. It is management's responsibility to provide a safe environment, *period*.

I would like to thank Garden Grove, California Branch 1100 Executive Vice President Barbara Stickler for her valuable research for this article. ✉