



Schedule awards and VA disability benefits

The Postal Service has a long history of employing military veterans. Unlike some employers who are reluctant to hire veterans, to its credit, the Postal Service hires military veterans even if they have prior service-connected disabilities. Most of our military veterans enjoy long and productive careers as letter carriers. However, due to the physical nature of our work, letter carriers with pre-existing injuries, including service-connected injuries, may aggravate or accelerate those injuries.

Letter carriers who suffer such on-the-job injuries or illnesses are entitled to certain benefits under the Federal Employees' Compensation Act (FECA). They include necessary medical care at no cost, reimbursement for transportation (or mileage) needed to obtain that care, wage-loss compensation when the injury results in disability from work, and schedule awards when there is permanent impairment.

The schedule award benefit is payable when an injured employee has suffered a permanent impairment to a part or function of the body that is listed in the schedule of body functions and members found in the FECA at 5 USC 8107. The schedule award provisions cover most appendages: arms, legs, hands, feet, and some—but not all—internal organs. Notably, schedule awards are not awarded to injuries to the head or spine.

Letter carriers who have accepted claims, including letter carriers with service-connected injuries, are entitled to schedule award benefits under

FECA. A letter carrier with a DVA (Department of Veterans Affairs) disability rating who has an accepted claim for an on-the-job injury has the right to request a schedule award. However, there are instances where caution must be exercised, especially where the DVA re-rates the injured body part and increases the monthly DVA disability benefit.

For example: A letter carrier with a DVA rating for the right knee has an accepted FECA claim for the aggravation of the right knee injury. If the letter carrier requests a schedule award for the right knee, and the DVA has increased the monthly disability payment due to the postal related injury, he or she will need to elect between the monthly DVA disability payments or the schedule award.

In many cases, the election of lifelong DVA disability benefits exceed the benefits of a schedule award. However, every case is different, and the injured worker should balance the schedule award with any increase in a DVA disability benefit for the compensably injured body part.

On the other hand, say a letter carrier with a DVA disability rating for the right knee has an accepted claim

for the right shoulder. The letter carrier requests a schedule award for the shoulder injury. FECA has a separate schedule for each limb. In this case, the letter carrier would be entitled to collect for both the knee (DVA disability) and the shoulder (FECA impairment).

Injured letter carriers with questions regarding schedule awards can get more information on the "Injured on the Job" section of NALC's website, nalc.org. You also can contact your national business agent's office, who can then put you in contact with a regional workers' compensation assistant (RWCA).

RWCAs have expertise in the schedule award process and can help in ensuring injured workers get the benefits they are entitled to.

