

**Contract Administration Unit**

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# Office time—Management’s arbitrary and often unrealistic expectations

**T**hroughout the years, Postal Service management has attempted many times to devise a system or a “tool” that projects a letter carrier’s daily workload. Believers in these systems or tools think they can take a mathematical formula and simply plug in some mail volume numbers, arbitrarily select a street time for the day, and apply some non-existent work standards to determine what time a carrier will leave the office and what time they will return from the street. Their goal is to determine how much “down time” the carrier has in order to pivot off another route.

In addition to using such time-projection systems, managers occasionally just pick arbitrary time allotments out of the air and attempt to apply such numbers to a letter carrier’s office and street time, and then expect them to meet those times. **One recent application arbitrarily limits letter carriers to no more than one hour of office time in the morning. No matter how much mail they have to case or how much other office work they must perform, they are instructed to be on the street no later than one hour after they begin their tour.** Another arbitrary time allotment by managers limits letter carriers to a predetermined amount of time in the evening, usually five minutes, to perform their required p.m. office duties.

Whether management is using a time-projection tool or simply applying arbitrary time allotments for letter carriers to adhere to, such ways to determine office times often do not allow for fixed office time to perform such necessary daily functions as vehicle inspections, stand-up talks, retrieving mail from the throwback case, withdrawing mail, and retrieving or signing for accountable items, to name a few morning office duties. If your office has an office break, that time is most likely not factored into these projections or allotted times either. Arbitrary projections and time allotments certainly do not take into consideration how much actual work needs to be performed and the actual time allowed for each of these office functions.

Letter carriers are required to perform certain tasks in the morning, before leaving for the route, and in the afternoon, upon returning to the office. Management’s projections or arbitrary time allotments are not the sole determinant of a carrier’s leaving or return time, or daily workload. **Using a time projection or applying an arbitrary amount of time does not change the letter carrier’s reporting requirements** outlined in Section 131.4 of *Handbook M-41, City Delivery Carriers Duties and Responsibilities*; the su-

pervisor’s scheduling responsibilities outlined in Section 122 of *Handbook M-39, Management of Delivery Services*; or the letter carrier’s and supervisor’s responsibilities contained in Section 28 of *Handbook M-41*.

The letter carrier’s reporting requirements outlined in Section 131.4 of *Handbook M-41* read, in relevant part, as follows:

#### 131.4 Reporting Requirements

131.41 It is your responsibility to verbally inform management when you are of the opinion that you will be unable to case all mail distributed to the route, perform other required duties, and leave on schedule or when you will be unable to complete delivery of all mail.

131.42 Inform management of this well in advance of the scheduled leaving time and not later than immediately following the final receipt of mail. Management will instruct you what to do.

131.43 Complete applicable items on Form 3996, Carrier-Auxiliary Control, if overtime or auxiliary assistance is authorized in the office or on the street.

131.44 Report on Form 1571 all mail undelivered—including all mail distributed to the route but not cased and taken out for delivery. Estimate the number of pieces of mail.

131.45 Do not curtail or eliminate any scheduled delivery or collection trip unless authorized by a manager, in which case you must record all facts on Form 1571.

131.46 Before you leave the office, enter on Form 1571 the mail curtailed; when you return, add any mail which was not delivered, and which was returned to the office. Follow any special local procedures set up to identify errors and corrective actions for mail returned because it was out of sequence.

Section 28 of *Handbook M-41* outlines the procedures for letter carriers to fill out PS Form 3996, Carrier—Auxiliary Control, and to submit it to the supervisor when the letter carrier estimates that the daily workload cannot be completed in the allotted time. It also details the requirements of the supervisor in Item L of the form. A complete explanation of Section 28, PS Form 3996 and related USPS supervisor responsibilities can be found in the *Letter Carrier Resource Guide* available at [nalc.org/resourceguide](http://nalc.org/resourceguide).

Section 122.33 of *Handbook M-39* requires a supervisor to provide a letter carrier with PS Form 3996 upon request once the supervisor has been verbally informed why the request is being made. That section states:

122.33 The employee, upon request, will be provided a Form 3996, Carrier - Auxiliary Control, after the supervisor has been

verbally informed as to the reason for the request. The employee shall not be denied the form and, upon request, a duplicate of the completed form will be provided the employee.

Article 41, Section 3G of the National Agreement reinforces the carrier's rights and management's responsibilities related to the PS Form 3996. It states:

G. The Employer will advise a carrier who has properly submitted a Carrier Auxiliary Control Form 3996 of the disposition of the request promptly after review of the circumstances at the time. Upon request, a duplicate copy of the completed Form 3996 and Form 1571, Report of Undelivered Mail, etc., will be provided the carrier.

Letter carriers are responsible for estimating the amount of time it will take to complete their assigned duties, and management has a responsibility to manage that workload within the confines of the handbook language. In attempting to meet bogus time projections or arbitrary time allotments, some required office duties are, at times, ignored or overlooked.

## Vehicle inspections

Vehicle inspections are often overlooked office duties. Letter carriers should be afforded time to properly inspect their delivery vehicle according to USPS Notice 76, Expanded Vehicle Safety Check, every day before operating the vehicle. Vehicle inspections should be performed as soon as possible after clocking in to allow letter carriers to promptly report vehicle deficiencies to management. These requirements are found in Sections 832 and 842 of *Handbook M-41*, which state:

832.1 Inspect vehicle as described on Notice 76, Expanded Vehicle Safety Check (see exhibit 832.1) for deficiencies, body damage, or inoperable items. See section 842 for reporting defects.

### 842.1 Reporting Defects

Driver must (a) report all mechanical defects or failures and major body damage on Form 4565, Vehicle Repair Tag (see exhibit 842.1) as soon as noted, and (b) immediately turn in the completed form to a dispatcher or manager. Minor body damage can sometimes await repair until the next regular inspection and need not be reported more than once.

Section 922.51.f of *Handbook M-41* indicates how the time for vehicle inspections is credited on the PS Form 1838-C, Carrier's Count of Mail – Letter Carrier Routes Worksheet, during the route inspection process. The minimum time allowance for performing vehicle inspections is three minutes; howev-

er, a proper vehicle inspection may take longer.

As indicated in Section 922.51, this inspection should be performed as part of morning office duties and should receive office time credit accordingly. Notice 76 specifies that letter carriers should perform Items 16 and 17 on the list with assistance from another person if possible. Vehicle inspections are an important part of maintaining letter carrier safety and should not be overlooked.

## Hold mail

Letter carriers also should be afforded the proper amount of office time to process hold mail. Mail may be held for many reasons, including customers being temporarily away or on a 10-day hold in anticipation of processing a change of address. The procedures for processing hold mail vary based on the type of mail and the reasons for the hold. These procedures are explained in depth in Chapter 2 of *Handbook M-41*. Whatever the reason mail is being held, letter carriers should process this mail on office time.

Handbook provisions instruct management to have letter carriers retain hold mail at the carrier case. This language is found in Section 117 of *Handbook M-39*:

### 117.1 Workroom Floor Layout

k. Hold Mail. Instruct the carrier to place hold mail in a central location only when space is not available at the carrier's case.

Letter carriers also must retrieve accountable items and special services mail on office time. Accountable items are keys, postage due, customs duty and special services mail. Letter carriers receive these items in the morning from the accountable clerk. These items are handled in accordance with Section 261 of *Handbook M-41*:

261.11 Accountable items are keys, postage due, customs duty, and special services mail.

261.12 Generally, carriers are required to call at the finance cage for accountable items. They may be called in groups by call of route numbers or by passing a paddle (see "Paddle System" in the Glossary). At some offices, the items are delivered to the carrier at his/her case.

This handbook language makes clear that the processing of these items should be credited to office time. Letter carriers should ensure that they are on office time when handling accountable items, whether in the morning before leaving for the route or in the afternoon upon returning.

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# Office time (continued)

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## Rest breaks

City letter carriers are entitled to two paid 10-minute rest breaks during each eight-hour workday. One of these rest breaks may be taken in the office on office time if your local branch has chosen this option. The negotiated two 10-minute break periods are the required minimum. Longer breaks may be established by past practice or by the local memorandum of understanding (LMOU). Letter carriers are required to take the negotiated breaks. The *Joint Contract Administration Manual (JCAM)* on page 41-28 explains this requirement as follows:

National Arbitrator Britton ruled that the Postal Service must ensure that all employees stop working during an office break. Contractual breaks must be observed and cannot be waived by employees (H4N-3D-C 9419, Dec. 22, 1988, C-08555).

If your branch has chosen an office break, letter carriers must take this break on office time. During the route inspection process, letter carriers receive credit for this office break on the PS Form 1838-C, and it is included in the office time evaluation for each route. Letter carriers should never skip their negotiated rest breaks whether they are taken in the office or on the street.

## P.M. office duties

In some locations, supervisors instruct letter carriers to complete their assigned p.m. office duties within a predetermined amount of time. Oftentimes, afternoon office duties can be unclear for city letter carriers. Section 4 of *Handbook M-41* specifies what duties letter carriers should perform as p.m. office functions after clocking back in from the street. The supervisor's responsibilities can be found in *Handbook M-39*. Those duties include the following:

### 127 Office Work When Carriers Return From Route

The carrier unit managers must observe and direct carrier activity when carriers return from the route. Observe such things as:

- a. See that carriers promptly clock in on return to office.
- c. See that clerks are available to check in accountable items as efficiently and promptly as possible.

As indicated, handbook provisions state carriers should clock back into the office immediately after unloading their vehicle and before disposition of collected mail. This is indicated in Section 42 of *Handbook M-41*:

### 42 Disposition of Collected Mail

Place the mail collected on designated table or in receptacles.

Sorting of outgoing collection mail and all other end-of-day activities should be conducted on office time. Letter carriers also should return accountable items to the clearing clerk for proper clearance while on office time, as indicated in Section 43 of *Handbook M-41* and Section 127.c of *Handbook M-39* cited above. See the following sections of *Handbook M-41* for detailed explanations of the p.m. office duties pertaining to accountable items:

### 43 Clearance for Accountable Items

- 431 Keys
- 432 Registered and Certified
- 433 Insured Mail
- 434 CODs
- 435 Customs Duty Mail
- 436 Postage Due

Processing of undelivered mail also should be performed on office time, whether this mail is processed in the morning or in the afternoon upon return from the route. Section 44 of *Handbook M-41* explains this requirement:

### 44 Undelivered Mail

#### 441 Processing Undelivered Mail

Follow procedures listed in part 24 to process forwardable and undeliverable mail (1) that you didn't process before leaving the office and/or (2) that you picked up on route. After processing,

place this mail in throwback case, as explained in part 24.

#### 442 Completing PS Form 1571

442.1 After return from your trip, obtain PS Form 1571, Undelivered Mail Report, from unit manager.

442.2 Add any mail which was not delivered but was returned to the office.

442.3 Sign the form and give it to a unit manager.

There is no set time in which the above duties must be performed. These duties are equally as important as morning office or street duties. Letter carriers still are responsible for estimating the amount of time it will take to complete their assigned duties. Likewise, management still has a responsibility to manage that workload within the confines of the handbook language.

**If letter carriers are not allowed to perform office duties, or if they are not afforded adequate time to perform these duties, a shop steward or branch officer should be notified so they can investigate and, if appropriate, file a grievance.**