



Office of Inspector General | United States Postal Service

## Audit Report

# Function 4 Efficiency – Suncoast District

Report Number MS-AR-18-002 | January 2, 2018



QUALITY

RELIABILITY

SUPPORT

CUSTOMER



PERFORMANCE



EXPERIENCE



SATISFACTION

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# Highlights

## Objective

Our objective was to assess Function 4 operational efficiency in the Suncoast District.

U.S. Postal Service financial systems track customer service operations as Function 4 operations. Function 4 includes customer service activities of employees at post offices, stations, and branches involved in distribution of mail, retail window, and miscellaneous administrative operations.

Hurricane Irma hit Florida in September 2017, impacting Postal Service operations, including those in the Suncoast District. As a result of this storm, we suspended our audit work and did not conduct site visits and observations at six of the 12 post offices selected, limiting our audit scope to the work that was conducted prior to the hurricane.

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***“U.S. Postal Service financial systems track customer service operations as Function 4 operations.”***

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## What the OIG Found

Based on our limited testing, the Suncoast District has opportunities to improve customer service operational efficiency. We visited six units and identified deficiencies that could contribute to inefficient customer service operations and decreased customer satisfaction. Specifically:

- Units did not always meet mail timeliness requirements. In particular:
  - Five units did not meet the target time for distribution of mail to letter carriers and were between 10 minutes and 1 hour late.
  - Two units did not meet the target for having mail ready for collection by Post Office (PO) Box customers and were between 32 minutes and 1 hour late. In addition, two units delivered mail to closed PO Boxes with one unit allowing access to seven of the closed boxes.

- Four units did not prepare and dispatch Postal Automated Redirection System (PARS) mail daily.

These conditions occurred because district and local management did not adequately update or follow Integrated Operating Plans/Mail Arrival Profiles and monitor PO Box and PARS mail processing procedures.

- Mail was not properly scanned. In particular:
  - Five units did not perform required “Notice Left” scans for 21 of 109 mailpieces.
  - Two units did not perform required mail arrival scans for two of six accountable mailpieces.
  - Three units did not perform required scans on mailpieces found at carrier cases and one unit in parcel hampers.



These conditions occurred because local management did not adequately monitor scanning procedures.

These deficiencies could contribute to late mail delivery and inefficient customer service operations. According to the Customer Service Variance Model used to assess retail customer service productivity, units we visited used 7,989 more workhours than planned in fiscal year 2017, costing the Postal Service almost \$327,000.



## What the OIG Recommended

We recommended management develop strategies to more effectively monitor customer service operations by:

- Coordinating units' integrated operating plans and mail arrival profiles;
- Actively monitoring employees to ensure efficient mail processing procedures;
- Instructing unit employees to follow required scanning procedures and ensure the procedures are followed.

# Transmittal Letter



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL  
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

January 2, 2018

**MEMORANDUM FOR:** ERIC D. CHAVEZ  
DISTRICT MANAGER, SUNCOAST

E-Signed by Janet Sorensen  
VERIFY authenticity with eSign Desktop  


**FROM:** Janet M. Sorensen  
Deputy Assistant Inspector General  
for Retail, Delivery and Marketing

**SUBJECT:** Audit Report – Function 4 Efficiency – Suncoast District  
(Report Number MS-AR-18-002)

This report presents the results of our audit of the Function 4 Efficiency – Suncoast District (Project Number 17RG020MS000).

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies provided by your staff. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Joe Wolski, Director, Sales, Marketing and International, or me at 703-248-2100.

Attachment

cc: Postmaster General  
Corporate Audit Response Management  
Vice President, Southern Area

# Results

## Introduction/Objective

This report presents the results of our audit of the U.S. Postal Service Function 4 Efficiency in the Suncoast District (Project Number 17RG020MS000). This self-initiated audit is part of a series of audits resulting from U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) risk models that identify the most and least

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***“Our risk model showed the Suncoast District was the seventh most efficient district for customer service operations in FY 2016.”***

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at-risk districts for Function 4 operational efficiency. To assist in further evaluating our risk model, we selected the Suncoast District, as our model showed it was the seventh most efficient district for customer service operations in fiscal year (FY) 2016. Our objective was to assess Function 4 operational efficiency in the Suncoast District.

Hurricane Irma hit Florida in September 2017, impacting Postal Service operations, including those in the Suncoast District. As a result of this storm, we suspended our audit work and did not conduct site visits and observations at six of the 12 post offices selected, limiting the scope of audit to the work that was conducted prior to the hurricane.

## Background

The Suncoast District, located in Florida, operated 376 post offices, stations, and branches, and processed more than 10.4 billion pieces of mail in FY 2016.

The district served over 5.1 million Post Office (PO) Boxes and business and residential addresses.

The Postal Service tracks customer service activities, referred to as Function 4, at post offices, stations, and branches as part of its ongoing effort to provide cost-effective, high-quality customer service. Postal Service managers are tasked with achieving Function 4 operational efficiency while following applicable policies and procedures. Strategic tools are available to assist managers in accomplishing this, including:

- *The Customer Service Variance (CSV) Model*, which helps assess retail customer service productivity at select retail units.
- *The Customer Services Adjusted Workload (CSAW)*, which uses a running average of the previous 12 weeks to project expected workload and earned workhours.
- *The Integrated Operating Plan (IOP) and Mail Arrival Profile (MAP)*, which is an agreement between the Postmaster and the manager of the Processing and Distribution Center (P&DC), which states when mail should arrive and the types of mail that will be present.
- *Distribution and Post Office Box Up-Time reports*<sup>1</sup>, which help track mail timeliness.
- *Scanning performance goals*. Properly scanning all barcodes will help provide package visibility, retain customers, and provide data to be used to improve operations and reduce costs.

Proper application of these tools could allow unit managers throughout the district to improve customer service operational efficiency.

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<sup>1</sup> Distribution Up-Time is the target time for distribution of mail to the letter carriers and Post Office (PO) Box Up-Time is the target time for having mail ready for collection by PO Box customers.

## Finding #1: Mail Timeliness

Units did not always meet timeliness requirements. In particular:

- During our observations of clerks sorting mail for distribution to letter carriers, clerks at five of the six units (Largo PO, Sand Lake Branch, South Creek Branch, St. Petersburg Main PO, and Clearwater Main PO) did not meet the daily target time, with delays of between 10 minutes and 1 hour occurring. In a subsequent analysis of the *Distribution Up-Time* reports for the 30-day period

from July to August 2017, which consisted of 27 daily scans conducted at each of the six units, we noted delays at all six units, ranging from 4 minutes up to 6 hours and 1 minute. Table 1 identifies the delays in *Distribution Up-Time* that occurred during this time period.

**Table 1. Six Units That Did Not Meet Scheduled Distribution Up-Time Scans (Between July and August 2017)**

Unit Name	Period Reviewed	On-Time or Early	Late	Delay	Percentage Late
Largo PO	7/31 - 8/30	2	25	22 minutes to 2 hours and 41 minutes	93%
Sand Lake Branch	8/1 - 8/31	10	17	4 minutes to 3 hours and 23 minutes	63%
South Creek Branch	7/29 - 8/29	13	14	18 minutes to 6 hours and 1 minute	52%
St. Petersburg Main PO	8/1 - 8/31	13	14	2 minutes to 1 hour and 11 minutes	52%
Clearwater Main PO	7/29 - 8/29	20	7	14 minutes to 1 hour and 16 minutes	26%
Kissimmee - Carrier Annex	8/1 - 8/31	20	7	5 minutes to 1 hour and 7 minutes	26%

Source: OIG analysis of Postal Service *Distribution Up-Time* reports for 30 days between July and August 2017.

- During our site visits, we observed that two of the five<sup>2</sup> units (Sand Lake Branch and St. Petersburg Main PO) did not meet the PO Box daily target time for mail ready for customers by 32 minutes at one unit and 1 hour at another. In a subsequent analysis of *PO Box Up-Time* reports for the 30 day period between July and August 2017, consisting of 27 daily scans conducted at each of the five units, we noted delays at four out of the five units ranging from 1 minute up to 4 hours and 10 minutes. Table 2 identifies the delays in *PO Box Up-Time* that occurred during this time period.

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***“We found units did not always meet timeliness requirements.”***

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<sup>2</sup> The sixth site (Kissimmee – Carrier Annex) did not have a PO Box section.

**Table 2. Four Units That Did Not Meet Scheduled PO Box Up-Time Scans (Between July and August 2017)**

Unit Name	Period Reviewed	On-Time or Early	Late	Delay	Percentage Late
St. Petersburg Main PO	8/1 - 8/31	3	24	1 minute to 4 hours and 10 minutes	89%
Sand Lake Branch	8/1 - 8/31	15	12	9 minutes to 2 hours and 49 minutes	44%
South Creek Branch	7/29 - 8/29	22	5	5 minutes to 2 hours and 9 minutes	17%
Largo PO	7/31 - 8/30	23	4	42 minutes to 1 hour and 37 minutes	15%

Source: OIG analysis of Postal Service *PO Box Up-Time* reports for 30 days between July and August 2017.

In addition, two units (Sand Lake Branch and St. Petersburg Main PO) delivered mail to closed PO Boxes with one unit allowing access to seven boxes on the closed box report<sup>3</sup>.

According to Postal Service policy, postmasters establish Distribution<sup>4</sup> and PO Box<sup>5</sup> Up-Times and strive to have all mail in PO Boxes as early as possible to attract customers to this premium service.

- Four units (Sand Lake Branch, South Creek Branch, Clearwater Main PO, and St. Petersburg Main PO) did not prepare and dispatch Postal Automated Redirection System (PARS) mail<sup>6</sup> daily. We found mail containers waiting for clerks to process and send back to the P&DC (see Figure 1). Clerks are responsible for improving customer service by properly identifying and expediting the flow of Undelivered As Addressed mail and advancing mail to the P&DC for processing on automated equipment.<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 1. Unprocessed PARS Mail**



Source: OIG photograph taken August 29, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Standard Operating Procedure PO Box Billing Process, dated April 2011.

<sup>4</sup> *Field Operations Standardization Development – Morning (AM) Standard Operating Procedures Guidebook*, Section 3-3, IOP, dated March 2011.

<sup>5</sup> *Postal Operations Manual*, Issue 9, Section 141.423, dated July 7, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> PARS is an automated system to redirect Undeliverable as Addressed mail. PARS identifies and redirects UAA mailpieces at their point of origin rather than at their destination, providing significant savings through a reduction in sort passes and processing time associated with handling redirected mail.

<sup>7</sup> Handbook PO-441 *Rehandling of Mail Best Practices Policy*, Section 2-2.1, dated April 2002.

Mail timeliness issues occurred because district and local management did not adequately monitor key processes related to the following:

- **Outdated IOPs and MAPs.** All six units visited had IOP/MAPs; however we found inconsistencies in five of the six IOP/MAP mail volume and mail arrival/departure times; however, during the course of our audit, local management took corrective action by adjusting unit mail volumes and arrival/departure times. We will not make a recommendation on the IOP/MAP inconsistencies.

In addition, three units did not include IOP/MAPs mail arrival times and mail conditions to facilitate staffing requirements. Postal Service policy<sup>8</sup> requires each district to have an updated IOP/MAP between delivery units and plants to coordinate activities.

- **Mail Processing.** Local management did not adequately monitor PO Box and PARS mail processing procedures, because other duties took priority.

By improving the timeliness of mail through more effective monitoring, district management could potentially save money by decreasing labor hours and customer complaints related to mail delays. For the units we visited, we identified 9,619 and 7,989 excess workhours in FYs 2016 and 2017, costing a total of \$399,862 and \$326,670, respectively.

**Recommendation #1:**

**Suncoast District Manager** should coordinate mail arrival times and mail condition in the units' integrated operating plans and mail arrival profiles.

**Recommendation #2:**

**Suncoast District Manager** should actively monitor employees to ensure efficient mail processing procedures.

**Finding #2: Scanning**

We determined that employees did not perform required scans on mailpieces. In particular:

- Five units did not perform required notice left scans on mailpieces that could not be left on the delivery attempt (see Table 3).

**Table 3. Notice Left Mail Scanning Performance (August 2017)**

Unit Name	Total Pieces Selected <sup>a</sup> and Traced	Number of Pieces Without Acceptable Scans
South Creek Branch	25	10
Clearwater Main PO	14	5
Largo PO	21	4
St. Petersburg Main PO	24	1
Sand Lake Branch	25	1
Total	109	21

Source: OIG analysis of Postal Service scan performance using the USPS.com Track & Confirm system.

<sup>a</sup>We selected up to 25 packages, if available.

- Two units (Largo PO and South Creek Branch) did not perform required mail arrival scans for two of six accountable mailpieces.

<sup>8</sup> Field Operations Standardization Development – Morning (AM) Standard Operating Procedures Guidebook, Section 2-2, IOP, dated March 2011.

- Three units (Kissimmee Carrier Annex, Sand Lake Branch, and South Creek Branch) did not perform required scans on mailpieces found by the teams upon arrival at sites. These parcels were found at carrier cases or in parcel hampers with scans being between one and six days old. Overall there were 20 mailpieces found with incorrect scans:

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*“We determined that employees did not perform required scans on mailpieces.”*

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- Five without acceptable stop the clock scans.
- Five undeliverable as addressed.
- Three delivered scans.
- Three notice left scans.
- Three business closed scans.
- One missent scan.

The Postal Service’s goal<sup>9</sup> is to scan every mailpiece that has a barcode ensuring 100 percent visibility throughout the process.

The mail scanning issues occurred because local management did not adequately monitor scanning procedures. When employees do not scan mailpieces correctly, customers are unable to determine the status of undelivered mail. Customers rely on accurate data to track their packages in real time. By improving scanning operations, district management can increase mail visibility, improve customer service, and receive fewer customer complaints related to the location and delivery status of their packages.



**Recommendation #3**

**Suncoast District Manager** should instruct unit employees to follow required scanning procedures and ensure the procedures are followed.

<sup>9</sup> Scanning at a Glance – Delivering 100 percent Visibility, page 13, August 2011.

## Management's Comments

Management agreed with the findings, recommendations, and monetary impact.

Regarding recommendation 1, management stated they will continue to review daily operations with Transportation and Customer Services. Daily teleconferences and communication is in place to discuss and address the MAP. IOP agreements and MAP submissions for the sites visited were completed on October 5, 2017.

Regarding recommendation 2, management stated they will continue to monitor employees to ensure efficient mail processing procedures by:

- a. Monitoring Distribution Up-Time and PO Box time at the district level with follow-up to the Manager of Post Office Operations (MPOO) on the same day to ensure compliance.
- b. Scan Point Measurement System reports will be reviewed daily for compliance.
- c. Holding a service talk for employees to ensure mail is not delivered to closed boxes.
- d. Recertification of all customer service offices stating that all employees are aware of the proper handling of PARS mail.
- e. Training new employees documented at each office on proper procedures to close out a PO Box.

The target implementation date is January 31, 2018.

Regarding recommendation 3, management stated they will continue to monitor through Delivery Programs and functional operation managers and will provide a service talk on proper scanning procedures to the field, requiring certification to the District upon completion. The target implementation date is January 31, 2018.

Regarding the monetary impact, management noted that the Clearwater Main Post Office was 3,211 hours under earned for FY 2016. Management agreed that there is opportunity for improving efficiency and it will lead to dollar savings. Management also stated there are different factors that contribute to the potential savings, such as mail counting, proper clock rings by employees, outside impacts, etc. and ask for these to be taken into consideration when identifying a set dollar amount. Those factors aside, management agreed with the OIG's monetary impact findings.

See [Appendix B](#) for management's comments in their entirety.

## Evaluation of Management's Comments

The OIG considers management's comments responsive to the findings, recommendations, and monetary impact and corrective actions taken or planned should resolve the issues identified in the report.

Regarding management's comments on monetary impact, we believe that our methodology for assessing CSV performance—using 100 percent CSV variance rather than improvement targets—is a more reasonable indicator of the financial impact associated with the customer service operational inefficiencies. We limited our monetary impact calculation to the six units we visited, and recognize the Clearwater Main Post Office was 3,211 hours under earned work hours in FY 2016. The calculation is intended to encourage management action to avoid these potential costs in the future.

Regarding recommendation 1, we reviewed the updated IOP/MAP documentation provided to us with management's comments and find it completes the actions in the recommendation. We consider recommendation 1 closed with issuance of this report. Recommendations 2 and 3 require OIG concurrence before closure. The OIG requests written confirmation when corrective actions are completed. Recommendations 2 and 3 should not be closed in the Postal Service's follow-up tracking system until the OIG provides written confirmation that the recommendations can be closed.

# Appendices

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# Appendix A: Additional Information

## Scope and Methodology

The scope of the project is Function 4 efficiency of the Suncoast District during FYs 2016 and 2017. Postal Service financial systems track customer service operations as Function 4 operations. Function 4 includes customer service activities of employees at post offices, stations, and branches involved in distribution of mail, retail window, and miscellaneous administrative operations.

We judgmentally selected 12 units within the district based on customer service variance, full-time employees, and location for observation and additional analysis. However, due to operations disruption throughout the Suncoast District caused by Hurricane Irma, we did not complete site visits at six units. The observations were limited to the six sites completed and may not represent operations throughout the district. To accomplish our objective we:

- Reviewed documentation and applicable policies and procedures related to Function 4 and customer service operations.
- Judgmentally selected packages at each unit to evaluate required scans.
- Observed customer service operations at six units in the Suncoast District.
- Obtained, reviewed, and analyzed operational data such as mail security and arrival times, scanning, drop shipments, and supervision.
- Interviewed appropriate retail operations managers at the unit and district levels to obtain a general overview of their customer service and Function 4

operations as well as actions they have taken, or planned to take, to increase customer service operational efficiency.

- Interviewed Postmasters and customer service supervisors at the units to determine if Function 4 operations are being completed according to Postal Service policies and procedures.
- Identified opportunities to decrease workhours for applicable fiscal years by subtracting earned workhours from actual workhours.

We conducted this performance audit from August through January 2018, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards and included such tests of internal controls as we considered necessary under the circumstances. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We discussed our observations and conclusions with management on November 28, 2017, and included their comments where appropriate.

We assessed the reliability CSV data by comparing it to data in eFlash and discussing the data with knowledgeable Postal Service officials. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

## Prior Audit Coverage

Report Title	Objective	Report Number	Final Report Date	Monetary Impact (in millions)
<i>Retail and Customer Service Operations in the Philadelphia Metropolitan District</i>	To assess retail and customer service operations in the Philadelphia Metropolitan District.	MS-AR-17-010	9/25/2017	\$8.2
<i>Function 4 Efficiency in the Greater Boston District</i>	To assess customer service operational efficiency in the Greater Boston District.	MS-AR-17-005	4/13/2017	\$16.8
<i>Function 4 Efficiency in the Colorado/ Wyoming District</i>	To assess customer service operational efficiency in the Colorado/ Wyoming District.	MS-AR-17-001	12/8/2016	\$5.3
<i>Customer Service Operations in the Capital and Northern Virginia Districts</i>	To assess customer service operations in the Capital and Northern Virginia Districts.	MS-AR-16-007	8/25/2016	\$16.2
<i>Function 4 Customer Service - Connecticut Valley District</i>	To assess Function 4 operations for efficiency and customer service in the Connecticut Valley District.	MS-AR-16-002	4/13/2016	\$23.3
<i>Customer Service Operations Efficiency - Chicago District</i>	To assess overall efficiency in retail customer service operations in the Chicago District.	MS-AR-15-005	4/28/2015	None

# Appendix B: Management's Comments



12/19/2017

LORI LAU DILLARD  
DIRECTOR, AUDIT OPERATIONS  
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

**SUBJECT:** Function 4 Efficiency in the Suncoast District (Report # MS-AR-18-Draft)

Thank you for your time in reviewing our Function 4 operations. We agree with your finding that there is opportunity to improve with the items noted in your report.

The following steps have been taken to address the items discovered during the audit.

**Recommendation #1: Suncoast District Manager** should coordinate mail arrival times and mail condition in the units' integrated operating plans and mail arrival profiles.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Suncoast District Manager agrees and will continue to review daily operations with Transportation and Customer Services. Daily teleconferences and communication is in place to discuss and address MAP. IOP agreements and MAP submissions were completed by October 5, 2017. A copy was provided to the OIG.

Target Implementation Date:

October 5, 2017

Responsible Official:

David Jordan, Manager of Operations Programs Support

**Recommendation #2: Suncoast District Manager** should actively monitor employees to ensure efficient mail processing procedures.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Suncoast District Manager agrees and will continue to monitor employees to ensure efficient mail processing procedures. This will be completed by the following items.

- a. Monitoring of DUT and PO Box time at the District level with follow-up to the MPOO's on the same day to ensure compliance. This begins immediately and Delivery Programs will be responsible for this.
- b. SPMS reports will be reviewed daily for compliance. Failing to meet the assigned time will be communicated via email for administrative action. Continuing failures will be forwarded to the applicable Manager of Post Office Operations/Postmaster for their action.
- c. Service talk to employees to ensure mail is not delivered to closed boxes. Delivery Programs will ensure this is completed no later than December 31, 2017. This will be documented and recorded.
- d. Recertification of all customer service offices stating that all employees are aware of the proper handling of PARS mail. Delivery Programs has begun this process and it will be completed by December 31, 2017. This will be documented and recorded.
- e. Training for new employees documented on PS Form 2548 for review at each office on proper procedures to close out a PO Box. Delivery Programs and Retail are responsible for this and the timeline to complete is no later than January 31, 2018.

Target Implementation Date:

January 31, 2018

Responsible Official:

- a. David Jordan, Manager of Operations Programs Support
- b. Suncoast Managers of Post Office Operations and Postmasters. Compiled by Jesse Hobson, Manager of Delivery and Customer Service Programs.
- c. Suncoast Managers of Post Office Operations and Postmasters. Compiled by Jesse Hobson, Manager of Delivery and Customer Service Programs.
- d. Jesse Hobson, Manager of Delivery and Customer Service Programs
- e. Carol Shirley, Retail Manager

Recommendation #3: Suncoast District Manager should instruct unit employees to follow required scanning procedures and ensure the procedures are followed.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Suncoast District Manager agrees and will continue to monitor through Delivery Programs and functional operation managers. Service talk on proper scanning

procedures to be provided to the field, requiring certification to the District upon completion.

Target Implementation Date:

January 31, 2018

Responsible Official:

Jesse Hobson, Manager of Delivery and Customer Service Programs.

**Monetary Impact:**

The OIG identified \$726,532 in cost savings between fiscal year 2016 and fiscal year 2017. We ask that it is noted that Clearwater Main Post Office was 3,211 hours under earned for FY16 and this is not noted on the report. We agree that there is opportunity for improving efficiency and this improvement will lead to a dollar savings. As there are different factors that contribute to the potential savings, such as mail counting, proper clock rings by employees, outside impacts, etc., we would ask that these are taken into consideration when identifying a set dollar amount. Those factors aside, we agree with the OIG's monetary impact findings.

The Suncoast District will continue working with all employee within its facilities to ensure they understand the importance of distribution up times, along with proper scanning requirements. New employees will be trained on the requirements upon starting in a facility. The Suncoast District Manager will continue to actively monitor employees and operations to ensure efficient mail processing procedures.

  
for: Eric D. Chavez  
District Manager  
Suncoast District

Cc: file



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