



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

Timeliness of Mail Processing at the Harrisburg, PA, Processing and Distribution Center

Management Advisory Report

Report Number
NO-MA-14-005

September 16, 2014

UNITED STATES POST OFFICE
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA
17106

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Highlights

In FY 2014, Q1 there were 98 million pieces of delayed mail. The level of delayed mail decreased to 61 million pieces in Q2 and 16 million pieces in Q3. Despite the FY 2014, Q3 improvement, there are still areas at risk that could make it difficult for the Harrisburg P&DC to process mail on time.

Background

Excessive delayed mail adversely affects U.S. Postal Service customers and harms the organization's brand. The U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General's (OIG) Performance and Risk Information System model identified the Central PA District as having significant delayed mail volume. Analysis of delayed mail during fiscal year (FY) 2014, Quarter (Q)1 and Q2 identified the Harrisburg Processing and Distribution Center (P&DC) as the plant most at risk for delayed mail, compared to similarly sized facilities.

Our objective was to determine whether the Harrisburg P&DC processed mail on time.

What the OIG Found

Although it has made improvements, the Harrisburg P&DC had difficulties processing its mail on time.

In FY 2014, Q1 there were 98 million pieces of delayed mail. The level of delayed mail decreased to 61 million pieces in Q2 and 16 million pieces in Q3. We attributed this improvement largely to a lower volume of mail processed in Q3. The addition of 113 employees in Q2 and Q3 also contributed to this improvement.

Despite the FY 2014, Q3 improvement, there are still areas at risk that could make it difficult for the Harrisburg P&DC to

process mail on time. For example, the Harrisburg P&DC has a June 2013 facility operating plan that does not reflect recent consolidation activity. An up-to-date operating plan would reflect changes in processing operations and give management an overview of the amount of mail projected to be cancelled. In addition, there were not enough maintenance employees in FY 2014, Q3, which put operations at risk. Of the authorized 189 maintenance positions, 64 were vacant, resulting in less preventative maintenance and equipment breakdowns. Equipment was down for nearly 4,000 hours for mechanical reasons in FY 2014, Q1 and Q2, an increase of 12 percent over the same period last year.

Finally, additional supervisory employees are needed to ensure adequate oversight; nine of the 26 authorized supervisor and two of three manager, Distribution Operations, positions were vacant in FY 2014, Q3.

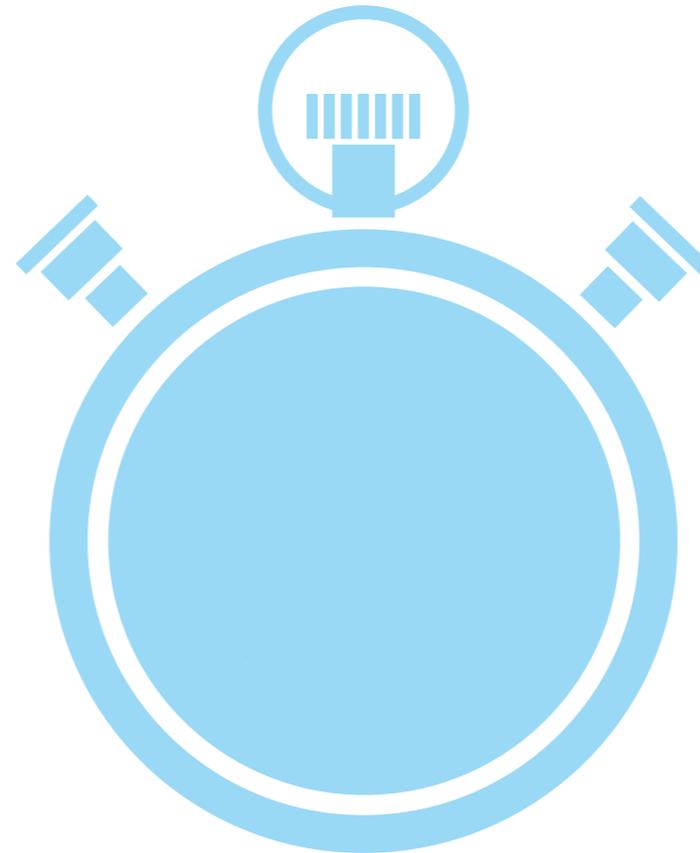
Delays in processing resulting from these areas at risk could cause late mail delivery that could negatively impact service performance.

What the OIG Recommended

We recommended the senior plant manager update the Harrisburg P&DC operating plan and fill maintenance and supervisor vacancies to authorized levels.

Areas at Risk

Harrisburg, PA P&DC



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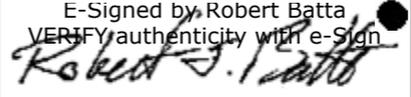
Transmittal Letter



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

September 16, 2014

MEMORANDUM FOR: CHRISTOPHER L. ALEXANDER
SENIOR PLANT MANAGER

E-Signed by Robert Batta
VERIFY authenticity with e-Sign


FROM: Robert J. Batta
Deputy Assistant Inspector General
for Mission Operations

SUBJECT: Management Advisory Report – Timeliness of Mail Processing
at the Harrisburg, PA, Processing and Distribution Center
(Report Number NO-MA-14-005)

This report presents the results of our review of the Timeliness of Mail Processing at the Harrisburg, PA, Processing and Distribution Center (Project Number 14XG016NO001).

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies provided by your staff. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact James L. Ballard, director, Network Processing and Transportation, or me at 703-248-2100.

Attachment

cc: Corporate Audit and Response Management

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Findings

Although the Harrisburg P&DC has made improvements, there are still areas at risk that could make it difficult to process mail on time. The facility operating plan needs to be updated to reflect the recent consolidation activity. Distribution Operation supervisor vacancies need to be filled to ensure adequate oversight and maintenance position vacancies need to be filled for increased preventative maintenance of mail processing equipment.

Introduction

This report presents the results of our self-initiated review of the Timeliness of Mail Processing at the Harrisburg, PA, Processing and Distribution Center (P&DC) in the Central PA District of the Eastern Area (Project Number 14XG016NO001). The U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General's (OIG) Performance and Risk Information Systems (PARIS) risk model identified the Central PA District as having significant delayed mail volume in fiscal year (FY) 2014, Quarter (Q)1 and Q2. Analysis of delayed mail during FY 2014, Q1 and Q2 identified the Harrisburg P&DC as the plant most at risk for delayed mail, compared to similarly sized facilities.

Our objective was to determine whether the Harrisburg P&DC processed mail on time.

See [Appendix A](#) for additional information about this review.

Conclusion

Although it has made improvements, the Harrisburg P&DC had difficulties processing its mail on time. In FY 2014, Q1, there were 98 million pieces of delayed mail. The amount of delayed mail decreased to 61 million pieces in Q2 and 16 million pieces in Q3. We attributed this improvement largely to a lower volume of mail processed in Q3. The addition of 113 employees in Q2 and Q3 also contributed to this improvement.

Despite improvement in FY 2014, Q3, there are still areas at risk that could make it difficult for the Harrisburg P&DC to process mail on time. For example, it has a facility operating plan dated June 2013 that does not reflect recent consolidation activity. An up-to-date operating plan would reflect changes in processing operations and give management an overview of the amount of mail projected to be cancelled. In addition, there were not enough maintenance employees at the facility in FY 2014, Q3, which put operations at risk. Of the authorized 189 positions, 69 were vacant, resulting in less preventative maintenance and equipment breakdowns. Equipment was down for nearly 4,000 hours for mechanical reasons in FY 2014, Q1 and Q2, an increase of 12 percent over the same period last year (SPLY).

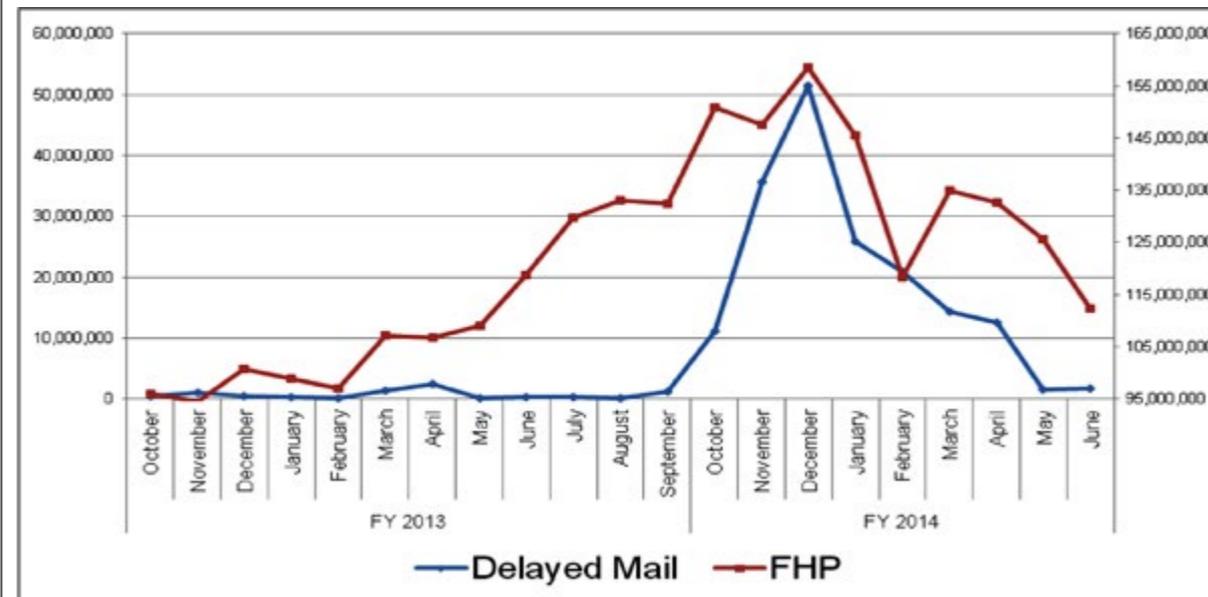
Finally, additional supervisory employees are needed to ensure adequate oversight, as nine of the 26 authorized supervisor and two of three manager, Distribution Operations, positions were vacant in FY 2014, Q3.

Delays in processing as a result of these areas at risk could cause late mail delivery that could negatively impact service performance.

Harrisburg Delayed Mail

During our observations, we found a minimal amount of delayed mail. From May 19-24, 2014, there were a total of 218,083 delayed mailpieces, which represented 0.85 percent of first-handled piece (FHP)¹ volume. We determined the Harrisburg P&DC properly counted all delayed mail volume and accurately reported it in the Web Mail Condition Reporting System.² The amount of delayed mail began to decrease at the start of FY 2014, Q3. This is also the time the Harrisburg P&DC experienced a decline in the amount of FHP volume (see Table 1).

Table 1. Harrisburg Delayed Mail and FHP Trend



Source: Enterprise Data Warehouse (EDW).

Comparable sites also showed a significant decrease in delayed mail as a result of the volume decline during Q3, with an overall decrease in delayed mail of 66 percent from Q2. Staffing was also a contributing factor. Harrisburg P&DC management hired 113 additional employees at the end of FY 2014, Q2 and the beginning of FY 2014, Q3.

Areas at Risk

Despite improvements in FY 2014, Q3, there are still areas at risk that could challenge the Harrisburg P&DC's ability to process mail on time. These areas include the facility's out-of-date operating plan and an insufficient number of maintenance and supervisory employees.

Operating Plan

The Harrisburg P&DC did not update its official June 2013 operating plan, including procedures for arrival and clearance times, to take recent consolidations into account. Consequently, employees did not have the information they needed to plan mail flow to avoid delays.

¹ A letter, flat, or parcel that receives initial distribution at a postal facility. FHP records mail volume in the operation where it receives its first distribution handling.
² The Web Mail Condition Reporting System is a repository of mail condition data entry and reporting.

An updated operating plan would reflect changes in processing operations and give management an overview of the amount of mail projected to be cancelled. Mail was arriving at the Harrisburg P&DC for cancellation as late as 10 p.m., which made it difficult for the plant to clear the mail in time to meet processing standards. For example, Postal Service standards as identified in the 24-hour clock require 80 percent of mail to be cancelled by 8 p.m.³ Our analysis showed the Harrisburg P&DC cancelled only about 47 percent of the mail by 8 p.m. and 69 percent by Operations' clearance time, which is the latest time committed mail can clear an operation for proper dispatch or delivery.

Maintenance

There are not enough maintenance employees at the Harrisburg P&DC to support mail processing. Of the 189 authorized maintenance positions, 64 were vacant in FY 2014, Q3 (see Table 2).

Table 2. Harrisburg P&DC Maintenance Complement

Position	Approved	On Rolls	Vacant
Electronic Technician	30	29	-1
Mail Processing Equipment Mechanic	35	25	-10
Maintenance Mechanic	47	12	-35
Building Equipment Mechanic	16	14	-2
Area Maintenance Technician	3	2	-1
Custodian	50	37	-13
Maintenance Support Clerk	8	6	-2
Total	189	125	-64

Source: webCOINS.

As a result of these staffing shortages in FY 2014, Q3, preventative maintenance for major pieces of equipment declined from the SPLY (See Table 3).

Table 3. Harrisburg P&DC Preventative Maintenance Completion Rates

Machine	FY 2013, Q1	FY 2014, Q1	Percent Change	FY 2013, Q2	FY 2014, Q2	Percent Change
Advanced Facer Cancellor System	99.9	93.5	-6.4	100.0	94.8	-5.17
Advanced Facer Cancellor System 200	99.8	98.7	-1.2	100.0	99.3	-.69
Automated Flats Sorting Machine 100	99.7	96.2	-3.5	99.0	96.3	-3.59
Automated Package Processing System	99.2	89.3	-9.9	99.0	90.9	-8.1
Delivery Barcode Sorter	99.5	92.4	-7.0	99.8	93.9	-5.9

Source: eMARS.

³ The 24-hour clock is an end-to-end process that ensures mail is collected, distributed, and delivered.

The decline in preventative maintenance led to frequent machine breakdowns, which delayed mail. We found machines were down for nearly 4,000 hours for mechanical reasons in FY 2014, Q1 and Q2, which is an increase of 12 percent compared to the SPLY.

Staffing shortages in the maintenance department also led to employees working excessive hours. The weekly overtime rate for the maintenance department was over 36 percent and maintenance employees worked an average of 53 hours per week. This led to projected earnings for 47 maintenance employees of more than \$100,000, with 24 of these employees earning more than \$150,000 for the year, when the average annual maintenance salary is \$66,142.

Supervision

Because of inadequate staffing, supervisors of Distribution Operations (SDO) were working more than 50 hours per week. Of the 26 authorized SDO positions, nine were vacant. Additionally, the senior manager, Distribution Operations, position was vacant and only one of the two authorized manager, Distribution Operations, positions was filled. Overall, 69 percent of authorized executive and administration schedule positions in mail processing were filled. The ratio of supervisors to employees was 1:39, which is inconsistent with the supervisor's span of control target of 1:25.

Recommendations

We recommend the senior plant manager update the Harrisburg P&DC operating plan and fill maintenance and supervisor vacancies to authorized levels.

We recommend the senior plant manager, Harrisburg Processing and Distribution Center:

1. Update the Harrisburg Processing and Distribution Center's operating plan to accurately reflect consolidations.
2. Fill maintenance and supervisor vacancies up to authorized levels.

Management's Comments

Management agreed with our findings and recommendations.

Regarding recommendation 1, management has submitted the updated operating plan for approval. The target completion date is September 26, 2014.

Regarding recommendation 2, management has filled five maintenance positions through FY 2014, Q3 and will complete interviews and testing for additional maintenance staff by September 19, 2014. An external register for hiring will also be available by FY 2015, Q1, although compliance with collective bargaining agreements may cause a delay. The target completion date is April 30, 2015.

Additionally, management has filled three of the nine supervisor, Distribution Operations, positions and will hire successful applicants resulting from a recent job posting to fill the remaining positions. The target completion date is October 18, 2014. Finally, management has filled two manager, Distribution Operations, positions and will repost the senior manager, Distribution Operations, position. The target implementation date is September 16, 2014.

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

Evaluation of Management's Comments

The OIG considers management's comments responsive to the recommendations and corrective actions should resolve the issues identified in the report.

Appendices

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to the right to navigate to
the section content.*

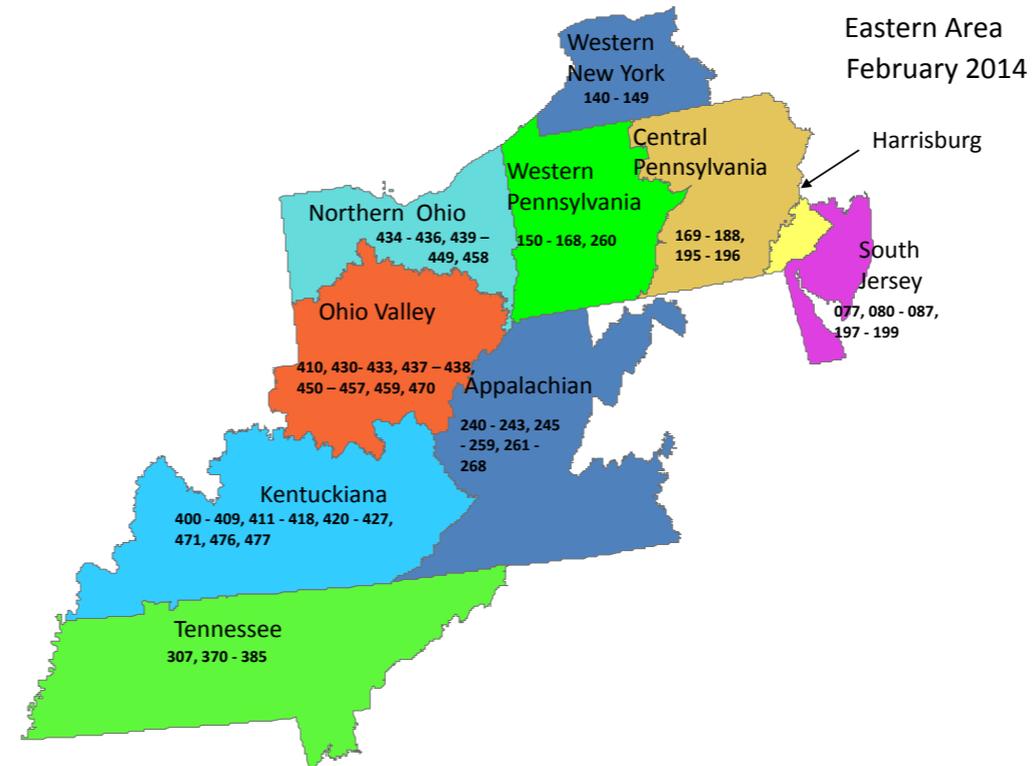
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Appendix A: Additional Information

Background

The Harrisburg P&DC is in the Central PA District in the Eastern Area. The Postal Service owns the facility, which covers 609,000 square feet, has two floors, and is equipped with three freight elevators. Figure 1 shows the Eastern Area districts by 3-digit ZIP Code™.

Figure 1. Districts with ZIP Codes in the Eastern Area



Excessive delayed mail adversely affects Postal Service customers. The Postal Service considers mail to be delayed when it is not processed or dispatched to meet its established delivery day.

The *President's Commission on the U.S. Postal Service* report, dated July 31, 2003, states that the mission of the Postal Service is:

“... to provide high-quality, essential postal services to all persons and communities by the most cost-effective and efficient means possible at affordable and, where appropriate, uniform rates.”

Title 39 U.S.C., Part 1, Chapter 4, §403, states:

“The Postal Service shall plan, develop, promote, and provide adequate and efficient postal services at fair and reasonable rates and fees.”

Prior Delayed Mail

In FY 2014, Q1 and Q2, the Harrisburg P&DC had over 159 million delayed mailpieces. Also, in FY 2014, Q1 and Q2, the Harrisburg P&DC's delayed mail volume increased by nearly 156 million mailpieces over the SPLY (see Table 4). Comparable facilities averaged 12.5 million delayed mailpieces during the same time.

Table 4. Harrisburg P&DC Delayed Mail Comparison

Time Period	Delayed Mail
FY 2013, Q1 and Q2	3,620,132
FY 2014, Q1 and Q2	159,455,914
Increase	155,835,782

Source: EDW.

The Harrisburg P&DC ranked high in delayed mail compared to 37 similarly sized facilities. For example, in FY 2014, Q1 and Q2, the Harrisburg P&DC ranked highest among comparable plants with:

- 159 million delayed mailpieces;
- 750,000 delayed Priority mailpieces;
- 8.5 million delayed Periodicals mailpieces; and
- 144 million delayed Standard mailpieces.

In addition, the Harrisburg P&DC ranked second highest among 37 comparable plants in late First-Class Mail with 5.9 million delayed mailpieces.

Customer Service

There are areas at risk at the Harrisburg P&DC that have the potential to negatively affect customer service. For example, as a result of past delayed mail, customer service in the Central PA District has declined. In FY 2014, Q2, all categories of service decreased from the SPLY. In particular, performance fell for Periodicals, Priority Surface, and EXFC⁴ 3-Day mail (see Table 5).

Table 5. Central Pennsylvania Service Scores

	FY 2013		FY 2014	
	Q1	Q2	Q1	Q2
EXEC Overnight	96.41	96.02	94.56	95.33
EXEC 2-Day	95.03	94.89	92.52	92.38
EXEC 3-Day	89.59	91.01	84.60	85.48
Priority Air	63.78	73.65	75.20	72.62
Priority Surface	80.77	86.95	86.16	79.25
Periodicals	83.08	84.74	59.72	65.86
Standard	79.70	85.16	78.70	80.99

Green font shows improvement; red font shows a decline.

Source: EDW and the Times Transit Measurement System.

Delays in mail processing contributed to a decline in the overall percentage of mail that arrived in delivery point sequence (DPS) at the delivery units. In the first 2 quarters of FY 2014, the percentage of DPS⁵ mail decreased compared to SPLY. Specifically:

- In Q1, the percentage of DPS mail was 91.43 compared to 92.96 percent for the SPLY.
- In Q2, the percentage of DPS mail was 91.76 compared to 92.96 percent for the SPLY.

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

Our objective was to determine whether the Harrisburg P&DC processed mail on time. To meet our objective, we conducted interviews; examined applicable Postal Service policies and procedures; and analyzed mail volume, workhours, and machine run times. We also analyzed trends and conducted observations at the Harrisburg P&DC.

We conducted this review from March through September 2014, in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation*. We discussed our observations and conclusions with management on August 1, 2014, and included their comments where appropriate.

⁴ External First Class Measurement

⁵ The goal is to have 95 percent of mail in DPS. The higher the percentage, the less mail carriers have to sort manually.

To conduct this review, we relied on computer-processed data maintained by Postal Service operations systems, which included the Web Mail Condition Reporting System, EDW, the Web Complement Information System, the WebEOR System, and the Management Operating Data System. A review of the OIG's Performance and Risk Information Systems (PARIS) risk model identified the Central PA District as one with significant delayed mail volume.⁶

We did not test the validity of controls over these systems; however, we verified the accuracy of the data by confirming our analysis and results with Postal Service managers.

Prior Audit Coverage

Report Title	Report Number	Final Report Date	Monetary Impact (in millions)
<i>Timeliness of Mail Processing at the Boston, MA, Processing and Distribution Center</i>	NO-AR-14-007	5/19/2014	None

Report Results:

Our report found the Boston P&DC did not always process mail on time, with about 28 million delayed mailpieces in FY 2014, Q1, representing a 56 percent increase in delayed mail compared to the SPLY. The majority of delayed mail was due to implementation errors associated with the Middlesex Essex P&DC consolidation. These errors included having an outdated operating plan; and not acquiring additional handling equipment, properly scheduling employees, enforcing proper color-coding of mail, and properly supervising mail flow. Consequently, service scores in Boston declined and the percentage of carriers reporting back after 5 p.m. increased by 25 percent during FY 2014, Q1. We recommended the vice presidents, Network Operations and Northeast Area, expedite material handling requests for the Boston P&DC, update the Boston P&DC operating plan, adjust staffing and scheduling of employees, train employees on proper color coding, and train supervisors on expediting mail flow. Management agreed with our recommendations.

<i>Timeliness of Mail Processing at the Hartford, CT, Processing and Distribution Center</i>	NO-AR-13-009	9/30/2013	None
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Report Results:

Our report found the Hartford P&DC experienced difficulties processing First-Class and Standard Mail on time during FY 2013, Q1 and Q2. For example, the Hartford P&DC delayed 34.4 million mailpieces and had the most delayed First-Class Mail and the second most delayed Standard Mail compared to similar facilities. About 37 percent of the delayed mail was the result of severe weather, which included Hurricane Sandy in October 2012 and a blizzard in February 2013. However, the majority of delayed mail was due to two major operational issues. Consequently, service scores declined and there was an increased risk that some customers would seek alternative delivery or advertising methods that could result in revenue loss. We recommended adjusting planning and scheduling to accommodate mail volume, especially during holiday periods, and ensuring earlier mail arrival that allows timely processing. Management agreed with the recommendations.

⁶ The PARIS model identifies districts that are at risk from an operational standpoint.

Report Title	Report Number	Final Report Date	Monetary Impact (in millions)
<i>Timeliness of Mail Processing at Processing and Distribution Centers</i>	NO-AR-12-010	9/28/2012	\$17,330,587

Report Results:

Our report found that, in FY 2012, the Postal Service made significant progress reducing the amount of delayed mail at its 43 largest P&DCs and improved service performance scores measured by the Intelligent Mail Accuracy and Performance System. Through FY 2012, Q3, about 1.4 billion mailpieces were delayed, while about 3.5 billion mailpieces were delayed in FY 2011. We identified issues that contributed to mail delays, including improper color-coding, inaccurate reporting, underutilized automation, floor congestion, incomplete operating plans, and a lack of mail inventory visibility. We recommended the Postal Service evaluate operations to reduce delayed mail in the network and ensure that field personnel are properly trained in color-coding Standard Mail and counting and reporting delayed mail in accordance with policy. We also recommended the Postal Service increase investment in and employee access to tools necessary to assist in identifying potential mail processing problems that could result in delayed mail. Management agreed with our recommendations.

<i>Timely Processing of Mail at the Pittsburgh, PA, Processing and Distribution Center</i>	NO-AR-12-008	9/18/2012	None
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Report Results:

Our report found that the Pittsburgh P&DC experienced difficulty processing mail on time in FY 2011, particularly Standard Mail. Among the 43 largest Postal Service facilities, the Pittsburgh P&DC ranked second highest in delayed mail, with more than 12 percent of mail delayed. We recommended the Postal Service adjust workhours, assignments, and other operational requirements to ensure the Pittsburgh P&DC processes mail timely compared to similarly sized facilities. We also recommended the Postal Service increase the capacity and throughput of tray sorters, expand windows of operation, improve mail flow throughout the facility, and train employees to ensure proper color-coding of Standard Mail. Management agreed with our recommendations.

Appendix B: Management's Comments

CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA PERFORMANCE CLUSTER
SENIOR PLANT MANAGER



September 12, 2014

LORI LAU DILLARD
DIRECTOR, AUDIT OPERATIONS

SUBJECT: OIG Project #14XG016NO001, Timeliness of Mail Processing at the Harrisburg, PA, Processing and Distribution Center

The following is provided in response to your review of the Harrisburg, PA, Processing and Distribution Center. The Central Pennsylvania District remains committed to improving performance at all of our processing and distribution centers and we appreciate the careful review and identification of opportunities for improvement at the Harrisburg P&DC.

Operating Plan

The Harrisburg P&DC did not update its official June 2013 operating plan, including procedures for arrival and clearance times, to take recent consolidations into account.

Recommendation

Update the Harrisburg Processing and Distribution Center's operating plan to accurately reflect consolidations and to improve the incoming mail arrival profile.

Operating Plan Recommendation Response:

The Harrisburg P&DC is in agreement with this finding. The Operating Plan has been updated to reflect changes to processing operations as a result of the consolidations and has been submitted for approval. All approvals will be completed by September 26, 2014.

Maintenance Staffing

There are not enough maintenance employees at the Harrisburg P&DC to support mail processing. Of the 189 authorized maintenance positions, 64 were vacant in FY2014, Q3.

Recommendation

Fill maintenance vacancies up to authorized levels.

Maintenance Staffing Recommendation Response:

The Harrisburg P&DC is in agreement with this finding. All opportunities to fill positions through promotion eligibility registers, and eReassign have been exhausted. We have filled five positions through in-service registers since the beginning of FY2014, Quarter 3. A second round of in-service testing and interviews will be completed on September 19, 2014. We have been approved to create an external hiring register and expect to have a pool of external applicants available for hire by the end of Quarter 1, FY2015. However, we must note that these vacancies are a result of extended Article 12 withholding due

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to Phase 1 Area Mail Processing activities and the Harrisburg P&DC is again under withholding for Phase 2 of Network Rationalization. Filling these positions must be in compliance with the relevant collective bargaining agreements and may not be possible until after the March 2015 move date for impacted employees at the Lancaster P&DC.

Supervisory Staffing

Because of inadequate staffing, supervisors of Distribution Operations (SDO) were working more than 50 hours per week. Of the 26 authorized SDO positions, nine were vacant. Additionally, the senior manager, Distribution Operations, position was vacant and only one of the two authorized manager, Distribution Operations, positions was filled.

Recommendation

Fill supervisory vacancies up to authorized levels.

Supervisory Staffing Recommendation Response:

The Harrisburg P&DC is in agreement with this finding. The Harrisburg P&DC currently has 29 authorized SDO positions, nine of which are vacant. Two of three authorized Manager, Distribution Operations positions are filled. We recently filled three SDO positions and have 8 positions in eCareer that closed on September 10, 2014. Successful SDO applicants from this posting will be effective October 18, 2014. The Senior Manager, Distribution Operations, position will be reopened for application in eCareer on September 16, 2014. All remaining positions not filled as a result of these postings will be filled in accordance with Eastern Area and Headquarters policy.



Christopher L. Alexander

cc: Joshua D Colin, PhD.
Todd Hawkins
David E Williams Jr
Sally K Haring
Linda M Malone
Dale M Walker



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