

Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review - Southern Maine Carrier Unit, Scarborough, ME

AUDIT REPORT

Report Number 23-076-5-R23 | May 10, 2023



Transmittal Letter



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

May 10, 2023

MEMORANDUM FOR: REGINA BUGBEE
MANAGER, MAINE-NEW HAMPSHIRE-VERMONT DISTRICT

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Joseph E. Wolski", is centered below the memorandum header.

FROM: Joseph E. Wolski
Director, Field Operations

SUBJECT: Audit Report – Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions
Review – Southern Maine Carrier Unit, Scarborough, ME
(Report Number 23-076-5-R23)

This report presents the results of our audit of Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review – Southern Maine Carrier Unit, Scarborough, ME.

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies provided by your staff. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Jennifer Schneider, Operational Manager, or me at 703-248-2100.

Attachment

cc: Postmaster General
Corporate Audit and Response Management
Chief Retail & Delivery Officer & Exec Vice President
Vice President, Delivery Operations
Vice President, Retail & Post Office Operations
Vice President, Atlantic Area Retail & Delivery Operations

Results

Background

This interim report presents the results of our self-initiated audit of mail delivery, customer service, and property conditions at the Southern Maine Carrier Unit in Scarborough, ME (Project Number 23-076-5), and responds to Representative Chellie Pingree’s interest in mail operations in the Portland, ME area. The Southern Maine Carrier Unit is in the Maine-New Hampshire-Vermont District of the Atlantic Area and services ZIP Codes 04074 and 04106. These ZIP Codes serve about 43,905 people in a predominantly urban area.¹ This delivery unit has 29 city routes and 18 rural routes. We judgmentally selected the Southern Maine Carrier Unit based on the number of Customer 360² and Informed Delivery³ contacts associated with the unit, undelivered route information, and Stop-The-Clock (STC)⁴ scans performed at the unit.

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

Our objective was to evaluate mail delivery and customer service conditions at the Southern Maine Carrier Unit, in Scarborough, ME.

To accomplish our objective, we focused on three audit areas: delayed mail, package scanning, and arrow keys.⁵ Specifically, we reviewed delivery metrics including the number of routes and carriers, mail arrival time, amount of reported delayed mail, package scanning, and distribution up-time.⁶ During our site visit we reviewed mail conditions; package scanning procedures; and arrow key security procedures. We also analyzed the scan status of mail pieces at the carrier cases and interviewed unit management and employees. We discussed our observations and conclusions as summarized in Table 1 with management on April 27, 2023, and included their comments where appropriate.

The Southern Maine Carrier Unit is one of five delivery units⁷ the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) reviewed during the week of March 13, 2023, that are serviced by the Southern Maine Processing and Distribution Center (P&DC). We are issuing this interim report to provide the Postal Service with timely information regarding conditions we identified at the Southern Maine Carrier Unit. We will issue a separate report⁸ that provides the Postal Service with the overall findings and recommendations for all five delivery units. See [Appendix A](#) for additional information about our scope and methodology.

Results Summary

We identified issues affecting mail delivery and customer service conditions at the Southern Maine Carrier Unit. Specifically, we found issues with all three areas we reviewed (see Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of Results

| Audit Area | Issues Identified | |
|------------------|-------------------|----|
| | Yes | No |
| Delayed Mail | X | |
| Package Scanning | X | |
| Arrow Keys | X | |

Source: Results of our fieldwork during the week of March 13, 2023.

We did not review truck arrival scanning and property conditions because the Southern Maine Carrier Unit is co-located with the Southern Maine P&DC.

¹ We obtained ZIP Code information related to population and urban/rural classification from Esri, which is based on 2010 Census Bureau information. Of the people living in these ZIP Codes, about 37,248 (84.84 percent) are considered living in urban communities and about 6,657 (15.16 percent) are considered living in rural communities.

² A cloud-based application which enables Postal Service employees to diagnose, resolve, and track customer inquiries.

³ Informed Delivery is a free and optional notification service that gives residential customers the ability to digitally preview their letter-sized mail and submit inquiries for mail pieces that were expected for delivery but have not arrived.

⁴ A scan event that indicates the Postal Service has completed its commitment to deliver or attempt to deliver the mail piece. Examples of STC scans include “Delivered,” “Available for Pick-up,” and “No Access.”

⁵ A distinctively shaped key carriers use to open mail-receiving receptacles such as street collection boxes and panels of apartment house mailboxes equipped with an arrow lock. Arrow keys are accountable property and are subject to strict controls.

⁶ Time of day that clerks have completed distributing mail to the carrier routes.

⁷ The other four units were Industrial Park Annex, Saco, ME (Project Number 23-076-1); Lewiston Main Post Office, Lewiston, ME (Project Number 23-076-2); Main Office Carrier Section, Portland, ME (Project Number 23-076-3); and Sanford Main Post Office, Sanford, ME (Project Number 23-076-4).

⁸ Project Number 23-076.

Finding #1: Delayed Mail

What We Found

On the morning of March 14, 2023, we identified about 11,155⁹ delayed mail pieces at 28 carrier cases and in three hot cases¹⁰. We found undelivered mail at carrier cases dating back to March 11, 2023. In addition, management did not accurately report this mail as undelivered in the Delivery Condition Visualization (DCV)¹¹ system. Management reported 4,788 delayed letters and flats from the previous day, representing only 42.92 percent of the delayed mail we identified at the unit. See Table 2 for the number of pieces for each mail type and Figure 1 for examples of delayed mail.

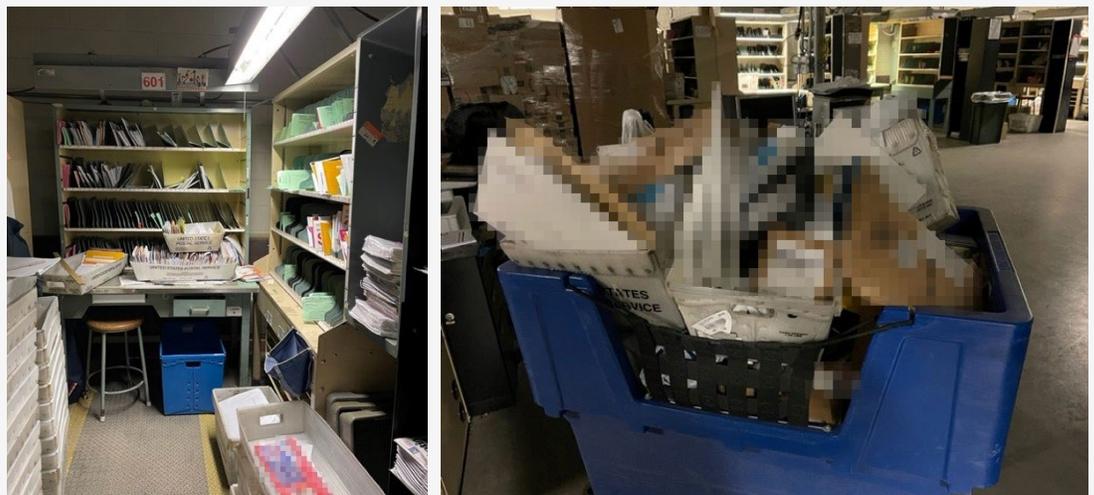
Table 2. Type of Delayed Mail

| Type of Mail | Carrier Cases | Hot Cases | Total OIG Estimated Count of Delayed Mail |
|---------------|---------------|------------|---|
| Letters | 5,871 | 397 | 6,268 |
| Flats | 4,295 | 48 | 4,343 |
| Packages | 539 | 5 | 544 |
| Totals | 10,705 | 450 | 11,155 |

Source: OIG count of delayed mail pieces identified during our visit on March 14, 2023.

Figure 1. Examples of Delayed Mail at Carrier Cases

Source: OIG photos taken on March 14, 2023.



Why Did It Occur

Management stated they did not have enough resources to deliver all the mail each day. The acting station manager stated they had significant staffing issues, including a shortage of carriers, carriers on extended leave, and carriers with work restrictions limiting the number of hours they can work or duties they can perform. According to management the unit shares part-time carriers with the Main Office Carrier Section. We analyzed vacancy data provided by the District Manager of Field Human Resources and determined the two units were understaffed by 31 part-time carriers as of March 24, 2023.

In addition, management did not accurately report delayed mail in the DCV system because they were more focused on mail delivery, which limited their ability to properly perform their managerial duties.

⁹ Count of mail included individual piece counts and OIG estimates based on Postal Service conversion factors in Management Instruction PO-610-2007-1, *Piece Count Recording System* and Handbook M-32, *Management Operating Data Systems*, Appendix D.
¹⁰ A case designated for final withdrawal of mail as carriers leave the office.
¹¹ A tool for unit management to manually self-report delayed mail, which provides a snapshot of daily mail conditions at the point in time when carriers have departed for the street.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have provided the station with enough resources to deliver all the mail each day. Postal Service policy¹² states that all types of First-Class Mail, Priority Mail, and Priority Express Mail are always committed for delivery on the day of receipt. In addition, managers are required¹³ to report all mail in the delivery unit after the carriers have left for their street duties as either delayed or curtailed in the DCV system. Further, management must update DCV if volumes have changed prior to the end of the business day.

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

When mail is delayed, there is an increased risk of customer dissatisfaction, which may adversely affect the Postal Service brand. In addition, inaccurate reporting of delayed mail in the DCV system provides management at the local, district, area, and headquarters levels with an inaccurate status of mail delays and can result in improper actions taken to address issues.

¹² *Committed Mail & Color Code Policy for Marketing Mail* stand-up talk, February 2019.

¹³ *Informed Visibility Delivery Condition Visualization User Guide*, September 2022.

Finding #2: Package Scanning

What We Found

Employees improperly scanned packages at the delivery unit. In total, employees scanned 250 packages at the delivery unit between November 2022 and January 2023 (see Table 3). Further analysis of the STC scan data for these packages showed that 60 percent of them were scanned “Delivery Attempted – No Access to Delivery Location.” This data excludes scans that could properly be made at a delivery unit, such as “Delivered – PO Box” and “Customer (Vacation) Hold” but, rather, represent scans performed at the delivery unit that should routinely be made at the point of delivery.

Table 3. STC Scans at Delivery Unit

| STC Scan Type | Count | Percentage |
|---|------------|-------------|
| Delivery Attempted – No Access to Delivery Location | 150 | 60.00% |
| Delivered | 93 | 37.20% |
| No Authorized Recipient | 3 | 1.20% |
| Receptacle Full / Item Oversized | 2 | 0.80% |
| Delivery Exception – Animal Interference | 2 | 0.80% |
| Total | 250 | 100% |

Source: OIG analysis of the Postal Service’s Product Tracking and Reporting (PTR) System data. PTR is the system of record for all delivery status information for mail and packages with trackable services and barcodes.

In addition, on the morning of March 14, 2023, before carriers arrived for the day, we judgmentally selected 30 packages¹⁴ from the carrier cases to review and analyze scanning and tracking history. Of the 30 packages sampled, three (10 percent) had improper scans.¹⁵ Two packages were missing an “Arrival at Unit” scan and one package was scanned “Held at Post Office at Customer Request” but was scanned away from the point of delivery.

Why Did It Occur

These scanning issues occurred because unit management did not adequately monitor package scanning, as they were more focused on mail delivery. The acting station manager stated the staffing challenges are impacting mail delivery operations, and he does not have time to monitor package scanning on a regular basis.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have monitored scan performance daily and enforced compliance. The Postal Service’s goal is to ensure proper delivery attempts for mail pieces to the correct address with proper service,¹⁶ which includes scanning packages at the time and location of delivery.¹⁷

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

Customers rely on accurate scan data to track their packages in real time. When employees do not scan mail pieces correctly, customers are unable to determine the actual status of their packages. By improving scanning operations, management can potentially improve mail visibility, increase customer satisfaction, and enhance the customer experience and Postal Service brand.

¹⁴ The Southern Maine Carrier Unit sends their notice left packages to the Scarborough Post Office; therefore, we did not sample any notice left packages.

¹⁵ Twenty of the sampled packages were missing an STC scan to let the customer know the reason for non-delivery because an attempt had not been made to deliver these packages. We included these 20 packages in the delayed mail finding above.

¹⁶ *Delivery Done Right the First Time* stand-up talk, March 2020.

¹⁷ *Carriers Delivering the Customer Experience* stand-up talk, July 2017.

Finding #3: Arrow Keys

What We Found

Unit management did not properly manage arrow keys. On the morning of March 16, 2023, we reviewed the unit's inventory log for arrow keys and conducted a physical inventory of keys at the unit. We found four of the 161 keys located at the unit were not listed on the inventory log and four keys listed on the inventory log could not be located. Unit management provided documentation that one of the four missing keys had been reported to the U.S. Postal Inspection Service.

Why Did It Occur

Unit management stated they rely on the clerk to oversee the arrow keys because their focus is on mail delivery operations. The clerk stated he tries to keep the log current but missed the unrecorded arrow keys due to an oversight. The clerk also stated the missing keys have been on the log since he took over managing the keys but did not know if the keys had been reported to management. The PM supervisor was aware of the requirement to report missing keys to the Postal Inspection Service but stated, to his knowledge, there had been no missing keys at the unit for the past year.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have verified that arrow keys were properly inventoried. According to Postal Service policy,¹⁸ management must keep an accurate inventory of all keys and conduct a semiannual physical survey of all building keys. Missing keys must be immediately reported to the Postal Inspection Service.

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

When there is insufficient oversight and supervision of accountable items such as arrow keys, there is increased risk of mail theft. These thefts damage the Postal Service's reputation and diminish public trust in the nation's mail system. Additionally, because arrow keys open mail receptacles, lost or damaged keys can result in undelivered mail.

Management's Comments

Management agreed with all findings in the report.

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

¹⁸ *Administrative Support Manual* Issue 13, Sections 273.461, 273.464, and 273.471, July 1999 - updated through February 28, 2023.

Appendix A: Additional Information

We conducted this audit from March through May 2023 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 assessed the reliability of PTR and DCV data by reviewing existing information, comparing data from other sources, observing operations, and interviewing Postal Service officials knowledgeable about the data. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

Appendix B: Management's Comments



May 4, 2023

JOHN CIHOTA
DIRECTOR, AUDIT SERVICES

SUBJECT: Management Response: Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review – Southern Maine Carrier Unit, Scarborough, ME (Report Number 23-076-5-DRAFT)

Thank you for providing the Postal Service an opportunity to review and comment on the findings contained in the draft audit report, *Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review – Southern Maine Carrier Unit, Scarborough, ME*.

Management agrees with the three findings in the report on delayed mail, package scanning, and arrow keys.

Management has begun taking steps to address the three findings.

Delayed Mail: Management will retrain local EAS on the Standard Work for properly reporting delayed mail in DCV. Management continues to pursue recruitment activities in the Southern Maine area and post career opportunities weekly until all vacancies are filled.

Package Scanning: Personnel will be retrained on the proper way to scan parcels for non-delivery due to No Access, Weather Delays, and Integrity Scans. The Standard Work for proper scanning due to Weather Delays or No Access is communicated on a regular basis and always in advance of an expected weather event.

Arrow Keys: The office will be retrained on Standard Work and operating procedures for Arrow Key Management including updating key logs, reporting missing arrow keys to the USPS Inspection Service, returning any broken arrow keys to Topeka, and ensuring arrow keys are verified and secured daily. Recent Gemba's were completed and office in full compliance.

E-SIGNED by Regina.M Bugbee
on 2023-05-04 11:01:26 CDT

Regina M. Bugbee
Manager, Northern New England District

cc: Vice President, Area Retail & Delivery Operations (Atlantic)
Manager, Corporate Audit Response Management

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