

Salisbury Post Office in Salisbury, MD: Delivery Operations

AUDIT REPORT

Report Number 23-156-3-R24 | November 20, 2023



Transmittal Letter



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

November 20, 2023

MEMORANDUM FOR: DAVID C. GUINEY
MANAGER, MARYLAND 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 – Salisbury Post Office, Salisbury, MD: Delivery Operations
(Report Number 23-156-3-R24)

This report presents the results of our audit of mail delivery operations and property conditions at the Salisbury Post Office in Salisbury, MD.

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

Attachment

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

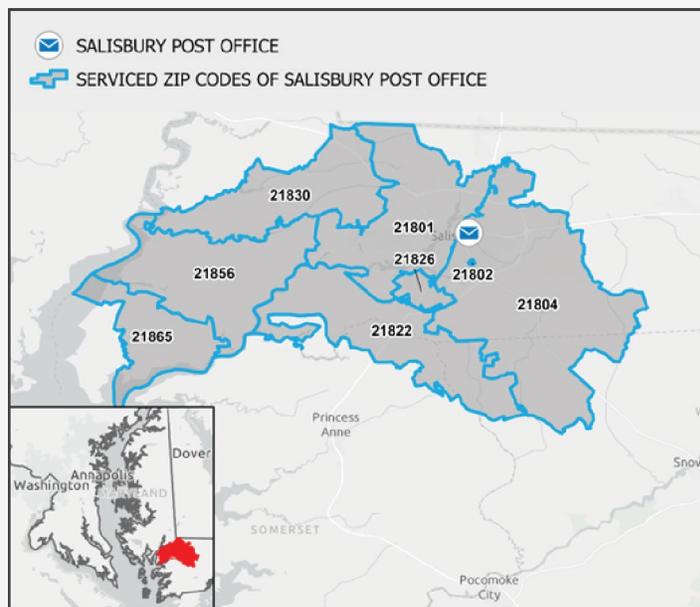
Results

Background

The U.S. Postal Service’s mission is to provide timely, reliable, secure, and affordable mail and package delivery to more than 160 million residential and business addresses across the country. The U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) reviews delivery operations at facilities across the country and provides management with timely feedback in furtherance of this mission.

This interim report presents the results of our self-initiated audit of delivery operations and property conditions at the Salisbury Post Office in Salisbury, MD (Project Number 23-156-3). The Salisbury Post Office is in the Maryland District of the Atlantic Area and services ZIP Code(s) 21801, 21802, 21804, 21822, 21826, 21830, 21856 and 21865 (see Figure 1). These ZIP Codes serve about 84,938 people in a predominantly urban area. Specifically, of the people living in these ZIP Code(s), about 70,269 (82.7 percent) are considered living in urban communities and about 14,669 (17.3 percent) are considered living in rural communities.¹

Figure 1. ZIP Codes Served by the Salisbury Post Office



Source: U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General.

This delivery unit has 36 rural routes and 24 city routes. The Salisbury Post Office is one of three delivery units² the OIG reviewed during the week of September 11, 2023, that are serviced by the Eastern Shore Processing Distribution Facility (P&DF).

We assessed all units serviced by the Eastern Shore P&DF based on the number of Customer 360³ (C360) delivery-related inquiries,⁴ Informed Delivery⁵ contacts, Stop-the-Clock (STC)⁶ scans performed away from the delivery point, and undelivered route information between May 1 and July 31, 2023. We also reviewed first and last mile failures⁷ between April 29 and July 28, 2023.

1 We obtained ZIP Code information related to population and urban/rural classification from 2020 Census Bureau information.
2 The other two units were the Cambridge Post Office, Cambridge, MD (Project Number 23-156-1); Easton Post Office, Easton, MD (Project Number 23-156-2).
3 A cloud-based application that enables Postal Service employees to diagnose, resolve, and track customer inquiries.
4 A compilation of package inquiry, package pickup, daily mail service, and hold mail inquiries.
5 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 mailpieces that were expected for delivery but have not arrived.
6 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."
7 First mile failures occur when a mailpiece is collected and does not receive a processing scan at the P&DC on the day that it was intended. Last mile failures occur after the mailpiece has been processed at the P&DC on a final processing operation and is not delivered to the customer on the day it was intended.

We judgmentally selected the Salisbury Post Office primarily based on Informed Delivery contacts. Specifically, the unit had an average of 11.3 Informed Delivery contacts per route compared to the district average of 10.2.⁸ The unit was also selected for last mile failures and undelivered routes.

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

Our objective was to evaluate mail delivery operations and property conditions at the Salisbury Post Office in Salisbury, MD.

To accomplish our objective, we focused on five audit areas: delayed mail, package scanning, arrow keys,⁹ carrier complement and timekeeping, and property conditions. Specifically, we reviewed delivery metrics, including the number of routes and carriers, mail arrival time, amount of reported delayed mail, package scanning, carrier complement and timekeeping, and distribution up-time.¹⁰ During our site visit we observed mail conditions; package scanning procedures; arrow key security procedures; timekeeping documentation; and unit safety, security, and maintenance conditions. We also analyzed the scan status of mailpieces at the carrier cases and in the “Notice Left” area¹¹ and interviewed unit management and employees. We discussed our observations and conclusions as summarized in Table 1 with management on November 2, 2023, and included their comments, where appropriate.

We are issuing this interim report to provide the Postal Service with timely information regarding conditions we identified at the Salisbury Post Office. We will issue a separate report¹² that provides the Postal Service with the overall findings and recommendations for all three delivery units. See [Appendix A](#) for additional information about our scope and methodology.

Results Summary

We identified issues affecting delivery operations and property conditions at the Salisbury Post Office. Specifically, we found issues with three of the five 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
Carrier Complement and Timekeeping		X
Property Conditions	X	

Source: Results of our fieldwork during the week of September 11, 2023.

We did not identify any findings with arrow keys or carrier complement and timekeeping. The arrow key inventory log was accurate, and the keys safeguarded. Also, the unit provided us all requested complement and timekeeping supporting documentation. Additionally, we determined that all carriers assigned to the unit reported to work between May 6 and July 28, 2023.

⁸ OIG analysis of Postal Service’s C360, Informed Delivery PowerBI models.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ Time of day that clerks have completed distributing mail to the carrier routes.

¹¹ The area of a delivery unit where letters or packages that the carriers were unable to deliver are stored for customer pickup.

¹² Project Number 23-156.

Finding #1: Delayed Mail

What We Found

On the morning of September 12, 2023, we identified about 700 delayed mailpieces of Certified Mail that had not been returned to the sender timely, Business Reply Mail (BRM) and mail at three carrier cases. Specifically, we identified 683 letters¹³ and 17 packages. In addition, management did not report this mail as undelivered in the Delivery Condition Visualization (DCV)¹⁴ system. See Table 2 for the number of pieces for each mail type and Figure 2 for examples of delayed mail at the certified mail area.

Table 2. Type of Delayed Mail

Type of Mail	Certified Mail Area	Business Reply Mail	Carrier Cases	OIG Count of Delayed Mail
Letters	568	68	47	683
Packages			17	17
Totals	568	68	64	700

Source: OIG count of delayed mailpieces identified during our visit on September 12, 2023.

Figure 2. Delayed Mail



Source: OIG photo taken on September 12, 2023.

Why Did It Occur

Management did not provide adequate oversight to verify that Certified Mail was returned timely. Management stated they did not verify if Certified Mail was processed daily because they instructed and trusted clerks to proactively share the responsibility when their other duties permitted. BRM was delayed because management believed it could be processed the day they receive it and delivered the next day. Management was unaware of delayed mail at the carrier cases because the evening supervisors did not conduct an effective sweep of the carrier cases or position themselves by the entrance when carriers returned from their street deliveries. We observed carriers that returned unnoticed and did not check in with their supervisor. Management did not report the delayed mail in the DCV system because they were unaware that they had delayed mail.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have verified delivery of all committed mail or accurately accounted for and reported delayed mail delivery volumes in the DCV system. Postal Service policy¹⁵ states that all types of First-Class Mail, and Priority Express Mail are always committed for delivery on the day of receipt. In addition, managers are required¹⁶ 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. Postal Service policy for Certified Mail states that if the article is not called for or redelivered, it must be returned after 15 calendar days.¹⁷ Postal Service policy for BRM states that BRM received before an office's Critical Entry Time is due for delivery that day.¹⁸ Further, management must update the DCV system if volumes have changed prior to the end of the business day.

¹³ OIG estimate based on Postal Service conversion factors in Handbook M-32, Management Operating Data Systems, Appendix D.

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ *Committed Mail & Color Code Policy for Marketing Mail* stand-up talk, February 2019

¹⁶ *Informed Visibility Delivery Condition Visualization User Guide*, March 2023

¹⁷ Certified Mail, Section 813.25 Notice of Arrival, outlines that if certified mail is not called for within five calendar days, a final notice should be issued and must be returned after 15 calendar days.

¹⁸ Business Reply Mail received before an office's Critical Entry Time (CET) for delivery that 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.

Finding #2: Package Scanning

What We Found

Employees improperly scanned packages at the delivery unit, scanned packages away from the intended delivery point, and improperly managed packages at the unit.

We reviewed package scanning data that occurred at the unit and removed any potentially accurate scans performed.¹⁹ In total, employees improperly scanned 74 packages at the delivery unit between May and July 2023 (see Table 3). Further analysis of the STC scan data for these packages showed that 67.57 percent of them were scanned “Delivered.”

Table 3. STC Scans at Delivery Unit

STC Scan Type	Count	Percentage
Delivered	50	67.6%
Delivery Attempted - No Access to Delivery Location	18	24.3%
Delivery Exception - Animal Interference	6	8.1%
Total	74	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.

We also reviewed 312 scans occurring away from the delivery unit and over 1,000 feet²⁰ from the intended delivery point between May and July 2023 (see Table 4). We removed scans that could have been performed within policy, such as animal interference and unsafe conditions. Further analysis of the STC scan data for these packages showed that 96.2 percent of them were scanned “Delivered.”

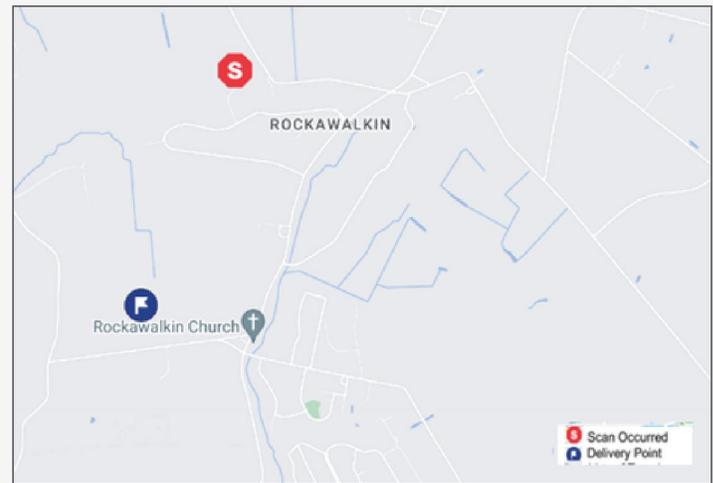
Table 4. STC Scans Over 1000 Feet Away from the Delivery Point

STC Scan Type	Count	Percentage
Delivered	300	96.2%
Delivery Attempted - No Access to Delivery Location	4	1.3%
Tendered to agent for final delivery	3	1.0%
Business Closed	2	0.6%
No authorized recipient available	2	0.6%
No such number	1	0.3%
Total	312	100%

Source: OIG analysis of the Postal Service’s PTR System data.

For example, the map below (see Figure 3) shows an instance where a carrier scanned a package as delivered about 2 miles away from the delivery point.

Figure 3. Scan Away from the Delivery Point in Hebron, MD



Source: Postal Service Single Package Look Up.

¹⁹ This data does not include scans that could properly be made at a delivery unit, such as “Delivered - PO Box” and “Customer (Vacation) Hold.” Additionally, P.O. Box scans at the unit were only counted when the delivery point was an address away from the unit. This category does not include mail addressed for a P.O. Box.

²⁰ Packages are expected to be scanned within a designated buffer distance from the delivery point. The Postal Service considers 900 feet or less an acceptable buffer. Therefore, the OIG evaluates any package that was scanned more than 1,000 feet from the delivery point.

We also found issues with scanning and handling of packages in the unit. On the morning of September 12, 2023, before carriers arrived for the day, we selected 51 packages²¹ to review and analyze scanning and tracking history. Of the 51 sampled packages, 11 (21.6 percent) had improper scans or handling, including:

- Four packages at the carrier cases were scanned “Delivered,” which should only be performed when a package is successfully left at the customer’s delivery address.
- Two packages at the Notice Left area were scanned “No Authorized Recipient Available” but were scanned 1.8 miles to 4.7 miles away from the delivery address.
- Two packages (one at carrier case and one at the Notice Left area) were scanned “Return to Post Office for Address Verification” on August 21 and September 2, 2023, but not placed in the designated area to be returned.
- Two packages at the carrier cases were scanned “Delivery Attempted” but were scanned 1.1 mile to two miles away from the delivery address.
- One package at the carrier case scanned “No Such Number” on September 5, 2023, but not placed in the designated area to be returned.

Further, 17 packages in the “Notice Left” area were not returned to the sender, as required.²² These packages ranged from three to 99 days past their scheduled return dates.

Why Did It Occur

These scanning and handling issues occurred because unit management did not adequately monitor and enforce proper package scanning and handling procedures. Management did not review scanning history reports regularly because they focused on other priorities such as ensuring that all mail was delivered. Management stated they

did not verify if the “Notice Left” section was worked daily because they instructed and trusted clerks to proactively share the responsibility when their other duties permitted.

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 mailpieces to the correct address with proper service,²³ which includes scanning packages at the time and location of delivery.²⁴ Packages on the “Notice Left” area should have been reviewed for second notices and returned to sender if they remained after the prescribed number of days.²⁵

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 mailpieces correctly and retain undelivered mail beyond the established number of days, customers are unable to determine the actual status of their packages. By improving scanning operations and handling procedures, management can improve mail visibility, increase customer satisfaction, and enhance both the customer experience and the Postal Service brand.

²¹ We selected 16 packages from the carrier cases and all the packages from the “Notice Left” area.

²² *Notice Left and Return Guidelines*, April 2016, states that domestic packages should be returned to sender on the 15th calendar day after a notice is left and international packages should be returned to sender on the 30th calendar day after a notice is left.

²³ *Delivery Done Right the First Time* stand-up talk, March 2020.

²⁴ *Carriers Delivering the Customer Experience* stand-up talk, July 2017.

²⁵ *Notice Left and Return Guidelines*, April 2016.

Finding #3: Property Conditions

What We Found

We found property safety, security, and maintenance issues at the Salisbury Post Office including:

Property Safety:

- A fire alarm pull in customer lobby was loose (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Loose Fire Alarm Pull Station



Source: OIG photos taken on September 13, 2023.

- The maintenance room was disorganized and contained excess items.

Property Security:

- Several trees along the fence line at the rear of the dock area were overgrown.
- “This is not an Exit” door signs needed to be replaced with Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA²⁶) compliant signs (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Improper Door Sign



Source: OIG photos taken on September 13, 2023.

Property Maintenance:

- Stained and misaligned ceiling tiles were found throughout the unit.
- Weeds and trash were scattered around the grounds of the unit (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Weeds and Trash Around the Unit



Source: OIG photos taken on September 13, 2023.

- Women’s restroom door was improperly fitted and difficult to open.
- Excessive old equipment stored in the shed area of the dock postal/employee parking lot.
- Signs on the property were faded and neglected. For example, the “Stop” sign and “US Property No Trespassing” sign were faded. The ground sign

²⁶ Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970.

by the street entrance was faded and letters had fallen off (see Figure 7).

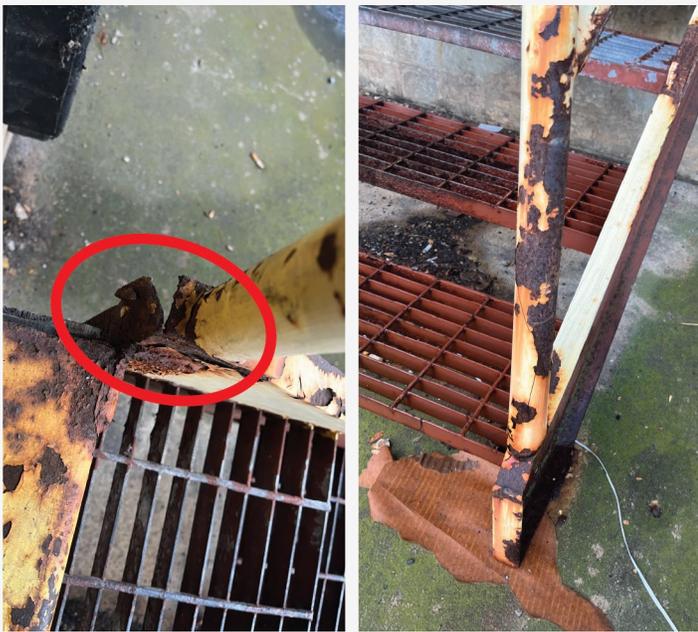
Figure 7. Faded USPS sign with Fallen Letters



Source: OIG photos taken on September 14, 2023.

- Receiving dock awning, support poles and stair railings showed excessive rust and needs to be replaced or repaired (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Rust on Receiving Dock



Source: OIG photos taken on September 13, 2023.

²⁷ A response line for all facilities construction, repair, alterations, and service-related requests.

²⁸ Postal Service Handbook EL-801, *Supervisor's Safety Handbook*.

We did not find any open repair requests in electronic Facilities Management System (eFMS) for the deficiencies we identified.

Why Did It Occur

Management did not provide sufficient oversight and take the necessary actions to verify that property condition issues were corrected. Management stated that they reported issues they notice in eFMS and that repairs are sometimes delayed due to Facilities Program Management contracting requirements. Management also stated they were focused on mail delivery and did not have time to check the conditions at the facility.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have provided timely follow-up with district maintenance, and Facilities Single Source Provider ²⁷ program or maintaining facilities, reviewing the safety and maintenance posture of the unit, and followed up to verify the issues were promptly addressed. The Postal Service requires management to maintain a safe environment for employees.²⁸ In addition, the OSHA requires employers to provide a safe and healthy workplace free of recognized hazards.

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

Management's attention to maintenance, safety, and security deficiencies can reduce the risk of injuries to employees and customers; reduce related costs, such as workers' compensation claims, lawsuits, and OSHA penalties; and enhance the customer experience and Postal Service brand.

Management's Comments

Management agreed with the delayed mail and property condition findings in the report, and partially agreed with the package scanning finding stating that 35 of the 74 scans were not scanning integrity issues. Management stated they have begun taking steps to address all 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 in the report. The OIG reviewed product tracking data, which showed that carriers scanned 74 packages at the delivery unit instead of the intended delivery point.

Appendix A: Additional Information

We conducted this audit from August through November 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.

In planning and conducting the audit, we obtained an understanding of the delivery operations internal control structure to help determine the nature, timing, and extent of our audit procedures. We reviewed the management controls for overseeing the program and mitigating associated risks. Additionally, we assessed the internal control components and underlying principles, and we determined that the following three components were significant to our audit objective:

- Control Activities
- Information and Communication
- Monitoring

We developed audit work to ensure that we assessed these controls. Based on the work performed, we identified internal control deficiencies related to all three components that were significant within the context of our objectives. Our recommendations, if implemented, should correct the weaknesses we identified.

We assessed the reliability of PTR, DCV, Time and Collection System and eFMS²⁹ 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.

²⁹ A custom-built Postal Service system used to manage work orders, contracts, and payments for facility construction, repairs, and alteration contracts, along with real estate contracts.

Appendix B: Management's Comments



November 8, 2023

JOHN CIHOTA
DIRECTOR, AUDIT SERVICES

SUBJECT: Management Response: Salisbury Post Office in the Maryland District: Delivery Operations
(Report Number 23-156-3-DRAFT)

Thank you for providing the Postal Service an opportunity to review and comment on the findings contained in the draft audit report, *Salisbury Post Office in the Maryland District: Delivery Operations*.

Management agrees with the two findings in the report on delayed mail and property conditions. We partially agree with the finding on package scanning.

Management has begun taking steps to address the three findings.

Delayed Mail: To ensure timely returns for certified mail the Salisbury Post Office has begun using visual aids. The first visual aid is the Return Timeframe Reference sheet now post of the side of the certified case. The second visual aid is a sign off sheet for the clerk who has completed the returns after fifteen days and the manager that has verified. Management returned sender the unclaimed certified mail on the day of the OIG's site visit. The Business Reply Mail identified by the OIG was delivered the following day and immediately began delivering the same business day. To ensure compliance, management at the district level, will conduct site reviews.

Package Scanning: Of the seventy-four improper scans reported by the OIG, 39 were scanning integrity issues. The remaining 35 were not. Management at the district-level will conduct site reviews to ensure compliance with scanning.

Property Conditions: Eight of the 10 property conditions have abated, and pictures provided as verification. For the remaining issues, work orders have been submitted.

E-SIGNED by DAVID.C GUINEY
on 2023-11-09 09:50:45 EST

David C. Guiney
Acting Manager, Maryland District

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

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