

Safety and health are paramount



**Brian L.
Renfroe**

we continue to have productive talks in collective bargaining with our counterparts at USPS Headquarters, we remain focused on doing all we can at the Headquarters level as well as across the country to address these two hazards.

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In the last few days leading up to penning this article, I have seen multiple videos of letter carriers being robbed and attacked. It is heartbreaking and appalling. Violence against our members cannot and will not be tolerated, and NALC remains committed to doing everything possible to stop these crimes.

There are a number of areas where we can and will make improvements to help stop this violence. We have been in constant communication with leadership at the Postal

Safety and health are more important than anything else. This statement is true in all aspects of life. It holds particularly true when talking about workers. As a union, one of our top priorities is, and always will be, the safety and health of the members we are privileged to represent.

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Service and in Congress to encourage and jump-start a few improvements.

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First, USPS continues testing alternatives for our Arrow lock system that utilizes technology to increase the security of our methods for opening collection boxes. I won't get into the details at this point for safety and security reasons, but the tests are promising, and I anticipate seeing replacement of Arrow locks and keys in the relatively near future.

Second, prosecution rates for crimes against letter carriers are low. This is unacceptable. Besides simply being the right thing to do and consistent with the principle of justice that our country was founded on, the reality of prosecution must act as a deterrent to violent criminals who target letter carriers. Criminals are less likely to commit crime when they know they will face severe consequences. We can no longer tolerate the low rate of prosecution by the Department of Justice. I applaud the leadership at the Postal Service for recently investing in resources to increase prosecutions, but more is needed. We are engaged with members of Congress on both sides of the aisle in both the House of Representatives and the Senate on legislation that will provide an additional push. We will do what we always do—make our voice heard by every elected representative.

We also continue our now decade-long fight to protect our members from the hazards posed by excessive heat. It is a scientific fact that temperatures are going up over time, and thus this hazard continues to grow. Too many of our members have suffered injury or lost their lives as a result of heat-related illness.

One outcome of this fight in the legal and collective-bargaining arenas was the creation of the Postal Service's Heat Illness Prevention Program (HIPPP) a few years ago. The HIPPP requires training to be conducted for all supervisors and letter carriers by April 1 each year. We are currently surveying the country to determine where this training was and wasn't conducted. Please communicate with your national business agent's office to let them know whether the training was or wasn't conducted in your work location. This information will assist us in dealing with the issue with our counterparts at USPS Headquarters.

The immediate step we all can take to protect ourselves is to become familiar with warning signs of heat stress. NALC has put together a wealth of information regarding heat safety on our website at nalc.org. We are working on additional ways to get this information to NALC members. Heat stress can come on quickly. Those suffering often do not realize they are in danger until they have become ill or suffered further injury. I encourage everyone to familiarize themselves with the warning signs and to share this knowledge with our brothers and sisters. This information can save lives.

I would like to end this month's message with a note of gratitude. Some of you may know that I sought treatment for alcoholism a few months ago, a disease I have struggled with sporadically over the last several years. While stepping away from our union's work for a short time to seek help was one of the most difficult decisions I have ever made, I deeply appreciate everyone who kept up our union's work during my absence. To those who sent words of support or offered a thought or prayer on my behalf, I sincerely thank you.

I am happy to report that I am healthy and more excited than ever to continue our work together to achieve results for you—the members of the NALC. I openly share my story with NALC members for one primary reason: If you or someone you know struggles with substance abuse, please reach out for help. For those afflicted by the disease of substance abuse, treatment is vital to one's safety and health and is available no matter who or where you are. Your only regret will be not seeking assistance earlier.



Entering the next phase of negotiations

As previously reported, NALC had continued to negotiate for a new collective-bargaining agreement with the U.S. Postal Service during the statutorily required 60-day mediation period. That period, which began with the formal expiration of the 2019-2023 agreement on May 20, was set to expire on July 19, after this issue went to press. While discussions on the pay, benefits and working conditions of the country's city letter carriers continued to be productive, the parties had yet to reach tentative agreement.

NALC President Brian L. Renfro and Executive Vice President Paul Barner were working closely together along with the union's lawyers and a team of national officers and staff to reach an agreement with postal management that is worthy of the dedication and hard work of our active membership.

While reaching a voluntary settlement that properly rewards city letter carriers for the work they do delivering the nation's mail remained NALC's goal, preparation has been ongoing for binding interest arbitration, should that become necessary. The meticulous work of marshaling evidence and recruiting expert witnesses to make our case in interest arbitration proceedings has been going on for months.

Under the law, such an impasse would trigger the appointment of a three-member arbitration board comprised of a union advocate, a management advocate and a neutral chair to conduct a binding arbitration to set the terms of a new national agreement.

With the deadline of the expiration of the statutorily mandated 60-day mediation period looming, NALC planned to continue, as has been the case in the past, negotiating with the USPS as the next phase of the process begins.

"As we have in recent rounds of collective bargaining, we will remain at the table with postal management as long as the prospects remain for reaching a tentative agreement that meets our goals," Renfro said on July 14. "But we will move expeditiously to invoke the procedures required by law to resolve an impasse in bargaining, should that prove necessary."