

WHAT'S
THE
DEAL
WITH

DOIS?

Wide-ranging problems, some straight-forward solutions

Apparently, letter carriers have a special creative gene that kicks in when it comes time to convert management acronyms into irreverent phrases—phrases that often are more accurate than the original.

Who can forget the recent favorite, MSP? It's not just "Managed Service Point" any more. Unfortunately, most of the alternate interpretations don't belong in a magazine that might fall into the hands of NALC members' children. But you've heard or seen them elsewhere.

So now we get to DOIS. Hmmmm...is the "D" for "dumb?" That might be too mild, since letter carriers across the nation are using plenty of harsh language when "discussing" the Delivery Operations Information System.

"DOIS isn't broken—it never worked right in the first place," said NALC President William H. Young. "What was supposed to be a data management tool has become an electronic *mis*-management device. It's a perfect example of 'garbage in-garbage out' technology."

"The scary part of it is, they are using the corrupt DOIS numbers as a basis for all their planning, budgets, staffing levels—the works," Young said.

DOIS is the subject of a national-level grievance, so, as a practical matter, DOIS-related contract violations are being thrashed out at the Headquarters level. President Young and Director of City Delivery Fred Rolando have met repeatedly over the past year with top-level postal managers to press the issue (see the President's Message, page 1, March 2006 Postal Record, also available at www.nalc.org/news/precord).

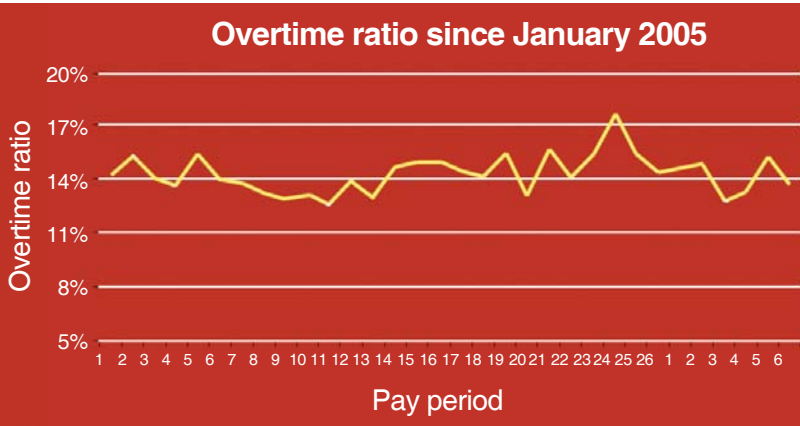
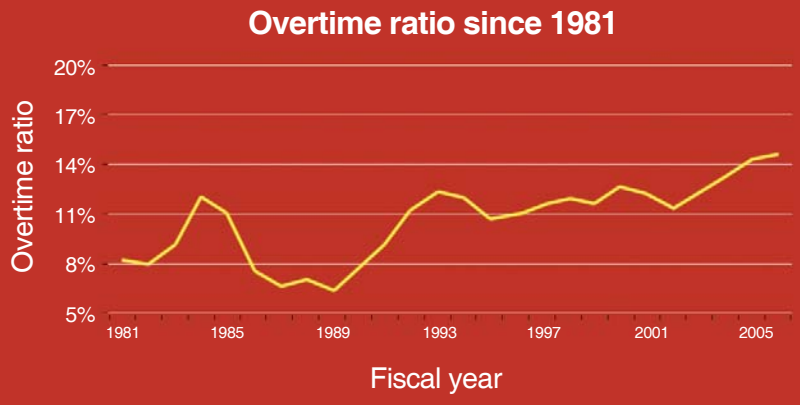
"Really, DOIS is our problem, at the national level," Director Rolando said, echoing a point he and President Young have made at numerous meetings with carriers across the country. "At the local level, what letter carriers need to do is use the protections provided in the contract and in the handbooks."

"Too many carriers on the workroom floor are struggling with supervisors who believe they can use DOIS as a tool of intimidation to squeeze carriers more and more," President Young added.

Don't be bullied

Instead of being bullied, President Young said, carriers need to stand firm when they are told "DOIS says" that they are "under standard," that they need to carry more mail, that they don't need assistance, that their route should be longer, not shorter. The bottom line message is, they must pick up the pace, both in the office and on the street—or so DOIS says.

The ideal overtime ratio (overtime hours divided by hours worked) for USPS should be 5-7 percent. Since the 1990s, the actual ratio has climbed steadily. Over the last 30 pay periods, the ratio has averaged 14.3 percent—the equivalent of every carrier working about 6 hours overtime every week for more than a year.



That’s bull (not an acronym). As Director Rolando says, “DOIS cannot be used to establish office standards, so it can hardly be used to decide whether a carrier is making office standards. And DOIS cannot be used to establish street standards, because there aren’t any!” (*See Director Rolando’s column, page 30.*)

Unfortunately, in too many stations, the bottom line *is* the bottom line. Supervisors under pressure to “make the numbers” are making up numbers to browbeat carriers, and they often target vulnerable ones—those new on the job or the ones who prefer to avoid confrontation.

Add to that the fact that many delivery supervisors today are inexperienced—the numbers are the only “reality” they know. They robotically move ahead, missing real-world considerations like the weather or a full coverage of flimsy, slippery flats. What DOIS says to them, they say to the letter carriers. Too often, the goal is to generate “numbers” that look good as they move up the line to the place where bonuses are decided.

As President Young has pointed out, the Postal Service needs a DOIS system—a DOIS system that is accurate and that could help modernize and improve delivery management. “If they had a system like that,” he said, “they wouldn’t need as many managers, and letter carriers could manage themselves.”

The system was conceived as a way to consolidate many statistical reports—budget, complement, work hours, and so on—on delivery operations. Instead of a pile of paper reports, top managers would have organized data to analyze to improve the way the Postal Service works.

Instead, the system was deliberately misprogrammed to ignore elements needed to calculate a carrier’s standard office time—the flaw most obvious to rank-and-file NALC members and the source of tension, conflict, and a growing number of grievances.

Recipe for disaster

Compounded by other built-in errors, DOIS misinformation is being used by the upper echelon to determine complement and to set budgets. The errors cascade upon themselves, each reinforcing the next until the data is worthless. “That’s a recipe for disaster, business-wise,” President Young said.

One example of the trouble bogus numbers can cause—and an example of mismanagement linked to DOIS—is overtime. It starts when supervisors use DOIS projections to push carriers to speed up, a few minutes one day, a few more the next. If the letter carrier wants to avoid conflict, or “help out” the Service or the supervisor, or simply do the job and go home, he or she may absorb those minutes, cutting a few corners, skipping a break—whatever it takes to make up the stolen time.

But that is unsustainable, especially when volume is heavy or the weather is foul. Eventually, the carrier is still out on the street when the eight-hour shift ends. In effect, DOIS is building overtime into routes, bypassing route inspections to tack on more street time by shaving office time. DOIS tells carriers to deliver more in



DOIS cannot be used to establish office standards, so it can hardly be used to decide whether a carrier is making office standards. And DOIS cannot be used to establish street standards, because there aren't any!



Fred Rolando
Director of City Delivery



less time, then reports those orders as fact, not fantasy.

Not only does this put carriers at risk and lead to workfloor conflict, it is plain bad for business. Using the DOIS numbers to calculate complement creates a world of false expectations. In almost every part of the country, carriers are crying out for hiring to relieve the burden of excessive and/or forced overtime.

DOIS-generated overtime, in fact, is poisoning the business. Historically, it's been accepted that to manage USPS efficiently, the ideal overtime ratio (overtime hours divided by total hours worked) should be near 5 to 7 percent—2 to 3 hours per week, on average. But in recent years the actual ratio for letter carriers has been steadily increasing (*see charts on page 11*).

In the past 30 pay periods, the overtime ratio has averaged 14.3 percent and has not dropped below 12 percent—roughly double the rate that makes sense for the business.

Everyone has heard that it's cheaper to pay overtime than to hire full-time employees with benefits—but that is true only up to around 7 percent. Management's real challenge with overtime is to maintain a balance.

Overstaffing would mean

idle workers on low-volume days; understaffing means excessive overtime on busy days or, worse, simply not enough total man-hours to get the work done. The flaws in DOIS are obscuring where that balance lies.

Many carriers look for overtime hours as a way to add to their income. Many others, however, don't want to spend any more time at work. That is why Article 8 of the National Agreement, Hours of Work, calls for the Overtime Desired List, lays out guidelines on equitability, sets conditions for requiring non-ODL carriers to work overtime, etc.

The many Article 8 grievances reaching the DRT Step B teams nationwide—nearly 6,000 in the past two years—are the tip of an ugly iceberg formed in part by DOIS.

Breaking down the overtime statistics reveals that 45 percent of all letter carrier work weeks contained three or fewer hours of overtime. The remaining 55 percent contained, on average, more than 20 percent overtime per week, some eight hours. Further, 14 percent of all work weeks included at least 12 hours of overtime—30 percent.

Clearly, the overtime balance is out of whack, and many complaints about DOIS from letter carriers are also complaints about the poor management of overtime.

The frustration carriers feel about DOIS—and all the mismanagement it has come to stand for—is the driving force behind NALC's efforts at the national level to fix the flaws that USPS already admits exist. At the same time, the union's national leaders are continuing to seek a better way to inspect and adjust carrier routes. The two issues are so tangled they must be tackled together.

For rank-and-file carriers, the bottom line is the protection of the contract, and the shop stewards and other local branch officers who stand with you. No matter what "DOIS says," you know the union is on your side. ☒

