

Working safely through the pandemic

Last month, NALC and the Postal Service agreed once again to continue several pandemic-related memorandums of understanding (MOUs). These MOUs, found in NALC's Materials Reference System on the NALC website, include temporary expanded sick leave for dependent care (M-01910), temporary additional paid leave for city carrier assistants (CCAs) (M-01911), temporary use of the 7:01 rule (M-01913), temporary workplace changes to promote social distancing (M-01915), and temporary use of TCAs (M-01916).

NALC and the Postal Service also agreed to another temporary time-limit extension on Step B and arbitration appeals (M-01930), as well as an agreement giving local parties the ability to develop a sign-up process for full-time employees who previously did not, or could not, place their names on either the overtime-desired list or work-assignment list (M-01931).

Each of these MOUs was designed specifically to address issues such as the effects of the pandemic on daily USPS operations, the ability of NALC representatives to deal with the ever-pressing COVID-19 issues while simultaneously meeting specific representational timelines outlined in the National Agreement, and, most importantly, to protect and ensure the safety and health of letter carriers, their families, their co-workers and their customers.

From the beginning of the pandemic, NALC national officers, staff and representatives throughout the country have been in constant communication and negotiation with management officials at every level of the organization regarding supplies, equipment, policies, protocols and work procedures neces-

sary to keep letter carriers safe. For example, early in the pandemic, NALC worked with USPS to establish alternate delivery instructions to eliminate customer contact for mail that requires customer signatures. To reduce health risks associated with this, USPS temporarily modified customer signature capture procedures for the Mobile Delivery Device (MDD) sign-on-glass feature, PS Form 3811 (Domestic Return Receipt), PS Form 3849 (We ReDeliver for You), and any hard-copy receipt items usually signed by customers. These modified procedures continue today and will continue until it is safe to return to the normal processes.

Early on, it also was evident that letter carriers need to socially distance from their co-workers; as a part of that, management needed to minimize the number of carriers being loaned to other offices. As a result, NALC and the Postal Service agreed to implement temporary workplace changes to promote social distancing among city letter carriers (M-01915). The MOU directs the local parties to immediately discuss potential scheduling and office setup changes such as staggered start times, the scheduling of letter carriers to begin tours in groups of 10 or fewer, the manner in which stand-up talks are given as well as the way break locations and times are arranged, and other initiatives to maximize social distancing.

The MOU also committed the parties to limiting individuals to working only in their employing facilities to the extent possible. When not possible, the Postal Service agreed to a few additional precautions in the limited circumstance in which a carrier is sent to another office to work. In these situations, the Postal Service agreed that the following should be done:

1. The supervisor and the steward in the losing office will jointly determine which carrier will go to the gaining office;
 2. If there is concern from either the loaned carrier or those in the gaining office about the loaned carrier entering the facility, the mail will be placed on the dock or somewhere outside where it can be loaded without entering the building;
 3. If a loaned carrier does not bring a vehicle from the losing office, the gaining office will have appropriate cleaning supplies for the carrier to sanitize the vehicle that he/she will be using.
- If any of the social-distancing measures put into place by M-01915 are not being followed, letter carriers should immediately notify their local branch representative or their national business agent.

In many offices throughout the country, USPS is currently conducting counts and inspections of letter carriers' routes. In early June, the Postal Service issued guidelines to its supervisors and managers regarding proper social-distancing protocols that must be followed while conducting a PS Form 3999, when performing a street inspection of a letter carrier's route; and while conducting a PS Form 1838-C, when counting a letter carrier's mail volume and office time. Some of these procedures include examiners always remaining at least 6 feet away from letter carriers at all times, examiners and carriers wearing face coverings in accordance with local ordinances and when social distancing cannot be maintained, using disposable gloves and other personal protective equipment, examiners avoiding direct hand-to-hand contact of the mail or inspection-related documents with the letter carrier, and mail being counted by examiners prior to the letter carrier

reporting for work. In addition, if a vehicle is needed, examiners must always use a separate vehicle.

Copies of the complete guidelines that managers and supervisors must follow if they conduct a PS Form 3999 or PS Form 1838-C on letter carriers have been provided to the NALC national business agents' offices. Additionally, these guidelines have been posted on the COVID-19 page on the NALC website. Letter carriers who are being inspected in the office or on the street should insist that examiners practice proper social-distancing rules.

Letter carriers also should insist on being provided, as well as commit to using, the daily supplies necessary to clean frequently touched items in the office and to clean steering wheels and other frequently touched surfaces in postal vehicles. From the beginning of this pandemic, USPS has committed to providing these types of supplies. Letter carriers also should have sufficient opportunity to wash their hands or be provided and use hand sanitizer, to keep their hands clean all day as they touch the many surfaces on their routes. USPS also should provide nitrile gloves for any employee who requests them.

The Postal Service established a COVID-19 Supplies Command Center to support USPS facilities with ordering and tracking supplies needed to keep employees safe and facilities clean during the coronavirus pandemic. In addition to facilities ordering supplies following standard procedures and using local sources where available, the command center is working closely with supply management and district supply coordinators to centrally fulfill orders for masks, gloves, air and hand sanitizers, cleaning products and other items directly from the USPS Material

Distribution Center in Topeka, KS.

Facilities and employees can contact the center for help tracking orders and for assistance in locating and ordering supplies. Additionally, the center is monitoring field inventories daily to assist districts in identifying facilities that are low on items needed to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Employees can call the COVID-19 Supplies Command Center at 844-773-3594, Monday through Friday, from 7 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Eastern Time.

From the beginning of the pandemic, USPS committed to providing face masks to any employee who wanted to wear one. In April, the Postal Service began requiring employees to wear face coverings in certain situations. At that time, the Postal Service released a mandatory stand-up talk stating that until the COVID-19 pandemic no longer is an issue, employees must wear face coverings or masks when there is a local or state face-covering order or directive in place, or when an employee who does not deal directly with the public cannot achieve or maintain social distancing in the workplace. Since then, cloth face coverings or masks have been made mandatory, consistent with such local or state face-covering directives or orders.

Some letter carriers have certain respiratory conditions that could make them more vulnerable to the effects of the virus. For these individuals, the Postal Service has committed to providing N95 face masks to employees who request them. Some letter carriers, for various reasons, are unable to wear face masks at all. For these individuals, the Postal Service has committed to providing them with clear face shields to protect themselves and others from transmitting the

coronavirus to each other via person-to-person respiratory droplets when they sneeze, cough or talk. If letter carriers are not being accommodated with special requests for N95 masks or clear face shields, they should immediately inform an NALC representative, who should in turn communicate that issue with their national business agent. NALC has been successful in getting these situations corrected.

The requirement that face coverings and masks are mandatory for employees who cannot achieve or maintain social distancing in the workplace should never be misconstrued to mean that social distancing is not as important when you are wearing a mask. Letter carriers should continue to maintain proper social distancing as best they can, even when wearing a mask or face shield.

The national officers, staff and NALC representatives throughout the country will continue communicating to USPS any issues regarding necessary supplies and equipment. NALC also will continue negotiating policies, protocols and work procedures necessary to keep letter carriers safe. Letter carriers should continue to contact their NALC representatives at any level of the organization with any questions, and to report offices that are not being sanitized on a regular basis, that do not have sufficient supplies (hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, masks, gloves, etc.), that are not practicing proper social-distancing guidelines, that are not providing daily communication regarding stand-up talks or safety precautions, that expect employees to work without protection or in a less-than-sanitary environment, or that have any other issues that put letter carriers at increased risk to contracting COVID-19. **PR**