



Safety and darkness

An old friend of mine who is retired used to mutter, “Tempus fugit” (time flies), and does it ever! This will be my last article for *The Postal Record* as director of safety and health, as I have been elected the new director of health benefits. I would like to thank all of the letter carriers, those who I have met and those who I have yet to meet, for helping make carriers’ jobs and lives safer.

With shorter daylight hours, and later start times, carriers are once again dealing with delivering mail after dark. This means you may wind up working in the dark. This causes issues every year. So what is safe? “Safe” depends on you and your route. There is no blanket policy regarding delivery after dark, because the very core issue to contend with is whether a particular carrier on a particular route can *safely* make mail delivery. Bottom line: Each carrier must weigh individual cir-

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cumstances about the type of delivery to be carried (door-to-door walking, mounted, apartments, cluster boxes, etc.), surroundings (unfamiliar, high crime, many steps and hills, etc.) and past experiences with after-dark deliveries.

Arbitrators have ruled that darkness in and of itself is not unsafe. Darkness can contribute to an unsafe situation. For example: You are on a walking route, it is not well lighted, and you trip over a crack in the sidewalk and, a few feet later, you stumble over something else. You may want to declare that swing as unsafe and move to the next swing. As you deliver on the next swing, the same rule applies. If it is well lighted, then deliver the mail. If you stumble due to poor lighting, then stop. Move to the next swing.

There are several things you can do to keep safe while delivering when it is dark. If you are on a walking route

and it is not well lighted, then you don’t cut across lawns. You want to walk where it is safest. This is normally the driveway and sidewalk. If the area is not well lighted, then you probably can not finger the mail while walking since you may not be able to see the addresses well enough. Additionally, if it is not well lighted, you cannot see where you are walking with your peripheral vision, so you actually need to watch where you walk.

You can have problems delivering on cluster box routes and dismount and mounted delivery due to darkness as well. If you have to turn on the overhead light to sort the mail for delivery, you may need to let your eyes adjust to the dark again before driving to the next box (safety). For a cluster box, there may not be enough light to sort the mail at the box, and you may have to sort it at the truck and then head for the boxes to make the delivery (inefficient). Dismount delivery is very similar to a walking route in the respect that you may not be able to sort the mail while you walk to the box (safety).

With management’s latest plan that everyone pivots, you may be delivering in the dark on a route you are not familiar with. Everyone needs to case in the dog warning cards. It becomes more difficult to tell where the barking dog is when

it is dark. You are the only one who can keep yourself safe.

If you choose to bring back the mail, let your manager know. You will need to be able to defend the decision with specific safety problems on the territory you brought back. This article is not to supersede any past practices in your city or any local agreements. Several of our cities have agreements regarding delivery cutoffs.

It is important to note it is not the intent of any carrier or of this office to endorse or encourage the unnecessary curtailment of any mail. It is about each carrier’s safety and the protection of the mail in our charge and management’s responsibility to manage. This is also not a blanket policy or approach. It very simply is the responsibility of each carrier to measure safety and report to supervisors any unsafe conditions encountered. It is management’s responsibility to provide a safe environment, *period*. ☒