

Getting a good start on 2011

It's a new year. Many of us propose new resolutions, some of us decide to turn over a new leaf, and then others of us just watch in amazement that another year has passed. Regardless of how you view a new year, here are some suggestions for getting a good start on 2011.

Have you checked your official personnel folder (OPF) lately? Your OPF is the record of your employment with the Postal Service. If you have had a step increase this past year, it should be recorded in your OPF. If you have received a letter of commendation or letter complimenting your service from a patron, it should be recorded in your OPF. Are you close to retirement age or have you had a change in your "life status" in the past year? All of these entries and more should be in your OPF. Everyone should review his or her OPF at least once a year—you can never be too careful with your work record.

If there are inaccurate documents in your OPF or documents that are missing, it could have a negative impact on your career. If significant dates are missing or wrong, it could cost you money. So, how do you review your OPF? It's quite easy and painless now that your OPF is in an electronic format. Log on to liteblue.usps.gov, click on the tab called "MY HR" and then click on "access my eOPF." At this point, you will be able to review each page of your OPF. If you notice something that doesn't belong, or is inaccurate or missing, contact Shared Services immediately and make the correction. You can contact them at Shared Human Resources Center, HRSSC/Compensation & Benefits, P.O. Box 970400, Greensboro, NC 27497, by phone at 877-477-3273 or by fax at 336-662-4070. If you need help with the process, you should seek the assistance of your shop steward.

Are you monitoring your uniform allowance? The annual uniform allotment for career letter carriers is now \$371. Your allotment is credited to your uniform account in conjunction with your anniversary date. Remember, your allotment does not roll over into the next year, so you lose whatever funds were not spent. It is a good idea to check your balance well before your anniversary date each year to determine if you have funds left unspent.

There is a toll-free number on the back of your allotment card that you can use to determine your balance. Your uniform allotment is a contractually guaranteed benefit and should not be squandered. You wouldn't throw a paycheck in the trash, would you?

Individuals and shop stewards need to work toward route protection. Ensure that routes in your office are receiving the proper time credit! Improper clock rings by way of using the wrong operation number(s) can have a negative effect on route evaluations and adjustments and create an inaccurate picture of a carrier's performance. That's why it's so important to accurately record the proper function when you use the timeclock.

Carriers working on operation Nos. 743 (Carrier Customer Support Activities), 742 (Misc. Activity-Customer Services.) or 741 (Misc. Activity-Delivery Services) while they perform "edit book" maintenance or other recurring office or street duties relative to their route will not receive this time credit for their route. Any carriers on operation No. 354 (Standby-Delivery Service) should not perform any of the duties of their route/assignment until they transfer back over to the appropriate operation number associated with productivity for the respective assignment. Operation No. 782 (Training-Delivery Service) time should also be looked at the same way. Carriers on 782 time should be actively engaged in some type of training. Learning a new case or delivery territory is not considered training and the assignment will not receive time credit when a carrier is performing office or street work while on operation No. 782.

For a complete list and description of operation numbers, refer to the handbook *M-32*, Management Operating Data System (MODS). The *M-32 Handbook* can be found on the NALC website under Departments>Contract Administration>USPS Manuals.

Auxiliary assistance provided should be credited to the appropriate route. This begins with letter carriers completing their portion of the PS Form 3996 and ends with management making the appropriate input into the Time and Attendance Control System (TACS). Shop stewards, you can review the TACS reports and compare them to completed PS 3996s to ensure the correct activity code

was used and the time was appropriately credited to the appropriate route. Remember, route protection is job protection.

Proper notification and certification—As the new year arrives, many branches have installed or will shortly install new officers. Often, with the changes in branch officers, new shop stewards are also placed into new positions. With that in mind, it is time to ensure that you have complied with the obligations of Article 17, Steward Certification. The National Agreement requires the union to certify to management in writing who is the appropriate shop steward in the installation or section, in accordance with the formula listed in Article 17.2.A.

To ensure that you have complied with the Article 17 requirements, you should review the two steward certification articles written in Contract Talk in the April and July 2010 issues of *The Postal Records*. If you don't have the back issues handy, these can be reviewed online at our website by clicking on "News" and then the dropdown named "*Postal Record*," and then selecting "Contract Talk columns" from the "*Postal Record* Departments" section.

Dollars and Cents—Article 9, Section 3.B covers cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs), and the next adjustment takes place the second full pay period after the release of the January 2011 Consumer Price Index, or CPI. CPI is a statistic reflecting increases in the cost of household goods and services for a given time period. At this time, there is no way to know if a COLA increase will take place, but any increase in the CPI and subsequent COLA increase will be reported on our website as soon as they are announced.

The new year is also the time for financial reports of all kinds. Employers, including the Postal Service, must provide employees with Form W-2 on or before Jan. 31. Branches are also obliged to supply W-2s to those who have received salaries.

Because branch officers manage and handle funds that belong to the branch and its members, they hold positions of trust—known in the law as "fiduciary" positions. There are "fiduciary duties" imposed on union officers by

law—duties to handle branch money and other property honestly and in the members' best interests. Federally imposed fiduciary duties are set forth in Section 501 of the Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act of 1959 (LMRDA).

A comprehensive guide to branch fiduciary duties is available on the NALC website by clicking on "Departments" and selecting "Secretary-Treasurer" and scrolling down to the "Secretary-Treasurer Topics" section and selecting "NALC Branch Officer's Guide to Finance and Administration." This resource would be an invaluable tool for a branch to have in the toolkit.

Quarterly overtime—Article 8, Section 5.A of the National Agreement allows full-time letter carriers to place their names on either the overtime desired list (ODL) or the work assignment list (WAL) during the two weeks immediately prior to the beginning of the calendar quarter (January 1, 2011). During the two weeks before the start of the quarter, employees may not only place their names onto the ODL or WAL, they also may switch from the WAL to the ODL or from the ODL to the WAL. Carriers wishing to stay on either the ODL or WAL need do nothing and their status will remain the same. Carriers may take their name off the list at any time during the quarter. Outside of the two weeks before the start of the quarter, only in limited circumstances may an employee sign the ODL or WAL.

In addition, a full-time flexible (FTF) already on the ODL or WAL who is reassigned during the quarter to a new section may immediately sign the list in the new section. The same applies to full-time regulars (FTR) who are transferred to another overtime section. A full-time carrier who is excessed or retreats under Article 12 may sign the ODL or WAL in the new or returning installation. Lastly, letter carriers returning from military duty may sign the list upon returning from military duty.

New year, new opportunities—It may sound trite, but the new year is a perfect time to renew our commitment to work on the details. Crossing our t's and dotting our i's couldn't be any more important than it is now as we begin to face the challenges of this new year. ☒