



Special delivery

Letter carriers have always done more than deliver the mail. Because of the nature of our jobs, we are on the streets in every neighborhood of every city in every state six days a week. As a result, we are often the first to arrive at the scene of an accident, a disaster and even a crime.

And without a second thought, we react. Each day, letter carriers perform way beyond the call of duty. Why? Because that's who we are; it comes with the uniform. We care about the communities we work in. We care about the customers we serve. We still believe in acts of heroism and kindness—things that, sadly, are too often hard to find these days.

Whether it's collecting food for the hungry, raising money for the Muscular Dystrophy Association, thwarting crime, putting out fires, keeping an eye on the elderly, saving lives or simply being that smiling face to a lonely senior citizen, letter carriers always deliver.

So it is no surprise that when the call came to deliver medicine in the event of a large-scale bio-terrorist attack, letter carriers once again stepped up.

In 2004, the secretary of Health and Human Services, the secretary of Homeland Security and then-Postmaster General John Potter signed an agreement to make resources of the Postal Service available to help deliver medicine communitywide in response to a biological terrorism incident. The agreement provided that letter carrier volunteers would deliver initial doses of preventive medications and public health information sheets to residential addresses. President Obama then issued an executive order in 2009 for a model to be developed to guide local planning for such an event. The Postal Service was chosen as the source of distribution because it has the capacity for rapid residential delivery of medicine across all communities in the United States.

But even before the executive order, the Postal Service and Health and Human Services, in conjunction with state and local officials, conducted pilot testing in Seattle, Philadelphia and Boston. In addition, a pilot was set in motion in Minneapolis/St. Paul. Just recently, Louisville as well as Vista and San Marcos—both in San Diego

County—were added to the list of cities involved in the Cities' Readiness Initiative.

In Minneapolis/St. Paul, "Operation Medicine Delivery"—the first full-scale test of the actual delivery of medicine and instructions by certified letter carrier volunteers—took place on May 6.

Letter carriers delivered empty pill bottles and materials to approximately 37,000 addresses. The letter carriers were escorted during the drill by local law enforcement officials, as they would be in a real emergency. The Minnesota Department of Health reported that the test went off without any obvious problems. A thorough assessment is being completed to identify any minor problems encountered during the test.

I was fortunate to be in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area on the day of the test. I was able to go to Robbinsdale Station in Minneapolis to observe as letter carriers and law enforcement officials arrived, were paired up and then loaded vehicles and departed for delivery. I was also able to attend a press conference that was held in St. Paul later that morning.

I cannot adequately describe to you the pride I felt as I watched this all take place. The program is designed to deliver preventive medication to our citizens within the first 48 hours of a bio-terror attack. This program is designed to help save the lives of thousands of citizens. And letter carriers have been the network chosen to deliver.

But when you think about it, who better to deliver life-saving medication than the most trusted federal employees six years running? Who better to deliver life-saving medication than the men and women who already selflessly and vigilantly watch over every community in America? Who better than the men and women who deliver better than anyone in the world? Delivering medication in an emergency is truly just an extension of what letter carriers do each and every day. It is a duty we readily accept.

I am so very blessed, not only to be a letter carrier, but to be able to represent all letter carriers. You never cease to amaze me when it comes to your heroism, your generosity and your willingness to always step up. Thank you for all that you do. ✉