



WEATHERING THE STORMS

From tornadoes to heat waves, carriers and PERF overcome Mother Nature's extreme challenges

Letter carriers are acutely aware of the weather. We watch forecasts carefully because we're outside doing our jobs, six days a week. Daily changes in temperature or precipitation matter to us, as do long-term weather trends. When weather turns extreme, we are among the first to go back to serving communities devastated by hurricanes or tornadoes. And sometimes it's our own houses and communities that get hit hard.

To speedily help carriers affected by the pounding weather we're increasingly seeing around us, the Postal Employees' Relief Fund (PERF) has overhauled its policies to help get funds to those in need faster. That should be a welcome change for those who have lost their homes since Hurricane Sandy struck late last year and have been trying to rebuild ever since.

Unfortunately, Mother Nature does not seem to be easing up with the wild weather, as carriers across the country have had to deal with record heat waves and the destruction caused by storms, tornadoes and other extreme weather events. Here's a look at what's been happening.

This year, scorching temperatures hit many areas of the country in late June and early July, providing an early reminder of the heat many letter carriers confront throughout the summer.

Cities across the Southwest rewrote the record books. Palm Springs, CA, set a single-day record high June 29, when the mercury reached 122 degrees. The high in Phoenix was 119 the same day, making it the fourth-hottest in the city's history. Salt Lake City also set a record high that day when the temperature peaked at 105.

In Las Vegas, the mercury reached 117 degrees on June 30—tying a record for the hottest temperature ever recorded in the city. Fortunately for the city's letter carriers, June 30 was a Sunday, but in the weeks before and after, highs frequently shot above 110.

People usually don't complain about heat in the Southwest—they are accustomed to temperatures above 100 degrees—but when the mercury goes to these extremes for many days, carrying the mail can be an ordeal for the most acclimated letter carrier, and even a health threat.

"Most of the guys and gals are carrying at least a gallon of water," Las Vegas Branch 2502 President **Glen Norton**

said. Since the water gets hot, most also carry a cooler of ice, he said. While his carriers are used to dealing with extreme heat, it can still take its toll.

“We’ve had a few cases of heat stroke over the years,” Norton said. “There’s not a lot of shade in the desert—it’s not an easy gig.”

Jeff Frace, a Branch 2502 steward, is on his seventh summer in Las Vegas. “It’s like standing in an oven—it’s very, very miserable.” He drinks plenty of water and eats salty snacks to replenish electrolytes, because the dry air causes more loss of water and salt through sweat.

“The LLVs are even hotter inside,” he added. “Anything you touch could burn your skin.”

Just a few weeks ago, before the heat wave struck, a carrier in his station was knocked off his route for a week because of heat stroke.

Letter carriers should drink plenty of water in advance, Frace said. If dehydration sets in, “by the time you realize what’s going on, it’s too late.”

Still, Frace takes the hot weather in stride. Unlike snow, he said, “you don’t have to shovel heat.”

Letter carriers in Alaska wished they could shovel heat away like snow this summer, because even they were feeling the effects of the June-July heat wave. Temperatures were reaching the mid-90s in parts of the state, setting record highs in some towns. Letter carriers more accustomed to dealing with extreme winter lows found themselves trying to stay cool instead.

“When it’s winter, you can put more clothes on, but in the summer, you run out of clothes to take off,” Fairbanks Branch 4491 Vice President **Ron Goessel** said. “You just have to stay hydrated. I go through a couple of bottles of water and Gatorade on my route.”

The low humidity in his part of the country makes the heat easier to bear, Goessel said, but in the Alaskan summer, when the sun sets after midnight and rises just two hours later, the heat sticks around longer each day. Brush dried in the heat easily catches fire, so dealing with smoke from dozens of wildfires is also a problem in summer, he added. But it’s still easier than car-

rying mail in the winter, when temperatures can reach 40 below and snowfall makes walking and driving hazardous.

Even in normal summer temperatures, letter carriers nationwide must cope with heat that can threaten their health. Unfortunately, as this issue of *The Postal Record* went to press, reports were emerging about letter carriers who perished or were hospitalized due to suspected heat-caused illness while on their routes.

A letter carrier walking his route in Medford, MA had sent texts to his wife about the difficulty of working in hot weather July 5, according to news media coverage. He collapsed and died that afternoon. Reports of other carriers with severe medical emergencies likely due to heat have come from throughout the country.

“Letter carriers need to know what to do to avoid heat illness, and then do it,” NALC Director of Safety and Health Manuel Peralta Jr. said. “Take the breaks. Drink the water. Do what you need to do—before it becomes a life-or-death situation.” Peralta urged carriers to read the detailed information on working in the heat on NALC’s website at nalc.org/depart/safety/heatwave.html.

MERCURY RISING

Lately it seems that the country is getting hotter, and that serious storms and weather events are hitting the country more frequently while packing a bigger punch.

It could be a short-term, cyclical change in weather patterns, or long-term climate change, or better technology for measuring weather. In any case, the latest data point to a warming trend. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), last year was the warmest ever recorded in the continental United States. The average temperature in the Lower 48 was



AP Photo/Ralph Fresco

Phoenix, AZ Branch 576 member Brian Johnson wipes the sweat from his forehead while delivering mail on his 400 house postal route on July 1, in Glendale.



BOOK'S PROCEEDS GO TO PERF

Two women from Massachusetts are doing more than their share to help postal workers who need help through PERF. **Kate Drury**, a member of Massachusetts Northeast Merged Branch 25, partnered with former letter carrier and former Branch 25 member Lois McNulty to collect tales of on-the-job heroism or humor from letter carriers across the country. In 2010, they published the stories in their book, *Carried Away—True Stories from Letter Carriers across America*. They donate all the proceeds from sales of the book to PERF.



“I noticed that when carriers meet other carriers, no matter where they are from, they just start telling stories,” Drury said. She and McNulty began collecting stories from letter carriers across the country. After gathering tales from almost every state, they compiled them into a book that anyone can enjoy—and that any letter carrier would love. The book is illustrated with whimsical photos of creative mailboxes and humorous cartoons drawn by letter carriers.

Drury included a few stories of her own, such as the time she met a customer from her route in a busy supermarket, but he didn’t recognize her out of uniform. When she reminded him that she was her letter carrier, he blurted out, for all to hear, “I didn’t recognize you with your clothes on!” The book also features some of the most inspiring stories of heroism on the job reported in *The Postal Record*. So far, sales of the book have raised \$2,500 for PERF.

Buying a pair of copies of *Carried Away*—one for yourself, the other as a gift—for \$15 is a fun way to support PERF. Mail a check made out to “Carried Away” to Carried Away, 20 E. Quincy St., North Adams, MA 01247-4308, or visit carriedawaytruestories.blogspot.com to order using PayPal. For information on large orders, contact Drury at the address above, at 978-462-1068 or at kdrury1@verizon.net. PR

55.3 degrees, 3.2 above the 20th century average and one degree higher than the previous record set in 1998.

A team of federal agencies and private groups that studies and reports on climate change predicts in its latest report that extreme weather—floods, droughts, tornadoes, hurricanes and scorching temperatures—will happen more often as global temperatures rise. Like turning up the heat under a pot of water, more energy in the atmosphere could bring more extreme weather. Changes in weather patterns could even affect wildfires, since rain and melting snow are nature’s way of preventing fire.

Even if those predictions don’t pan out, the impact of storms is growing as our population grows, especially in vulnerable areas like coastlines. More and more people, homes, businesses and schools are in the paths of storms, and the toll in lives and dollars is rising. Ports, military bases, power plants and tourist sites located in coastal areas are also at greater risk, compounding the economic toll.

The trail of destruction left by Hurricane Sandy demonstrated the vulnerability of populated coastal areas. When the storm made landfall in New Jersey last October, its winds had weakened to 80 miles per hour, barely hurricane-force speeds. Nevertheless, the surge of seawater it pushed ashore in a densely populated area made it the second-most costly hurricane in U.S. history. Only Katrina, the Category 3 hurricane that flooded New Orleans in 2005, did more economic damage.

The combination of expanding urban areas and changing weather means city letter carriers likely will find themselves dealing with extreme weather, including the destruction it causes, more often. And the “heat island” effect magnifies the hot temperatures in cities—pavement and roofs absorb the sun’s energy and radiate it as heat, while air conditioning units and car radiators pump hot air into the streets.

WHEN WEATHER BRINGS DISASTER

Mother Nature can destroy whole neighborhoods and take dozens of

lives in an instant, leaving an impact on letter carriers and their communities lasting months or years.

The powerful EF-5 tornado that touched down in Moore, OK, in May lasted 39 minutes, but it tore through a span of 17 miles, killing 24 people and injuring hundreds more. It severely damaged or destroyed hundreds of homes, schools, businesses and the Moore Post Office. Moore’s letter carriers are delivering mail from a temporary facility at an airport several miles away, where they must commute to case mail before driving to their routes.

The people of Moore have said goodbye to the loved ones they lost and begun clean-up and repairs following the horrible tornado that struck their community, but full recovery will take years.

With the huge tornado looming in his rear-view mirror, Moore carrier **Ray Chappell** raced to get back to the Moore Post Office to take shelter that day. The tornado is long gone, but the destruction it left is a daily reminder of its power. It cut a hole five blocks wide through Moore, taking out about a third of Chappell’s route.

“You can look from 16th Street and see all the way down to 11th Street,” he said. “The trees are gone; the houses are gone.” His route is in one of the most severely damaged areas of town.

The damage makes carrying mail harder. In addition to working from a temporary facility, Chappell and the other Moore carriers must navigate piles of rubble and workers clearing it or making repairs. The majority of his patrons, their homes gone or uninhabitable, have filed change-of-address cards until they can rebuild.

But the toughest part is the daily reminder of the tragedy, he said. “It gets to me. I know these people. They’re good people.”

Chappell lost three customers that day. He knew each one, and knows where they lived and where and how they died. One was a young girl who perished when the tornado hit her elementary school.

He couldn’t get into the damaged area to deliver for four days, but when he succeeded, he saw just how important

his job was to providing his customers with a sense of normalcy and hope.

“People were crying when they saw me,” Chappell said. “I got more hugs that day than I’ve ever had.” That experience, and the sight of the neighborhood getting a little better each day, lifts his spirits.

TAKING CARE OF OUR POSTAL FAMILY

Sometimes letter carriers like Chappell are a beacon of hope to people brought to their knees by a natural disaster, bringing vital supplies or documents—and a reminder that life will be normal again—to customers hit by a storm, flood or fire. But postal workers can also be victims.

To look out for our postal family, we support the Postal Employees’ Relief Fund (PERF).

Since 1990, PERF has been there to help carriers, clerks and other active and retired postal workers rebuild after hurricanes, typhoons, earthquakes, floods, tornadoes and wildfires. Initially created to assist postal employees affected by Hurricane Hugo and the San Francisco Bay-area earthquake, the fund has gone on to provide 3,168 grants totaling \$16,292,511 in the past 23 years.

While some of the Moore carriers are back in their damaged homes, others are still in temporary housing, Oklahoma City Branch 458 President **David Miller** said. Four carriers, three active and one retired, lost their homes entirely. One carrier is living with his wife and six children in a hotel while trying to find a new permanent home big enough for his large family.

PERF will continue to be there for postal workers in Oklahoma, in the path of Hurricane Sandy and the rest of the country, but with a new and simpler structure for determining eligibility and grant amounts.

The PERF Executive Committee adopted the new structure to speed and simplify the aid process and assure that every postal worker in need of PERF assistance would have access to its help as big disasters put increasing demands on its resources.

Under the new policy, applicants no longer need to wait until after they receive insurance settlements or other emergency relief to apply for help from PERF, though they still must provide documentation of the loss. The application must come to PERF no later than 120 days after the disaster, except under extenuating circumstances.

To qualify for assistance, the applicant’s home must have been destroyed or damaged to the point of being uninhabitable for a long period (an estimated 90 days or more). Homeowners whose residence are destroyed are eligible for a grant of \$3,000; homeowners or renters displaced by severe damage, but who will eventually return to their old homes, can receive \$2,000. Non-career and retired employees in either situation are eligible for half these amounts.

In addition to floods or storms, loss of a home in a fire is included, but only when caused by a natural disaster—for instance, a home lost to lightning or wildfire could qualify; a fire caused by an electrical short or stray cigarette would not.

These changes apply to natural disasters occurring on or after Oct. 29, 2012, which includes Hurricane Sandy.

“The PERF Executive Committee went through a tough process to make these changes,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said. “The new process reflects a new reality—more and more postal employees are affected by natural disasters, and it’s becoming harder to keep up with their needs. That makes your donation at this critical time even more important.”

You can mail a check to PERF at P.O. Box 7630, Woodbridge, VA 22195, donate by credit card online at its website, postalrelief.com, or text the word “PERF” to 50555 to make a one-time donation of \$10 (other charges may apply). You also can give to PERF through the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC); the CFC number for PERF is 10268. Contributions to PERF are tax-deductible for federal income tax purposes.

If you need help from PERF, visit its website, postalrelief.com, for eligibility and application information, call 202-408-1869 or send an e-mail to perf10268@aol.com. **PR**



SPECIAL DELIVERIES TO OKLAHOMA CITY

According to Oklahoma City Branch 458 President **David Miller**, the relief fund his branch created after tornadoes struck the city in May has collected nearly \$13,000. He expressed his thanks to letter carriers and others around the country who have sent supplies, uniforms and cash donations, including the letter carriers of Jersey City Branch 42, where branch member **Rajesh Nagpal** got to work collecting relief supplies as soon he heard about the tornado.

Nagpal got a commitment from the post office to ship to Moore for free, contacted Miller to find out what was needed, and put word out at his station for donations of clothing. “We collected all sizes, from child to adults, all new clothes, and shipped six boxes to Oklahoma,” he said (pictured above).

The Oklahoma tragedy supplied a reminder that everyday Americans appreciate letter carriers, too. As told by columnist Wally Speirs of the *Belleville News-Democrat*, a newspaper serving the St. Louis, MO suburbs in Illinois, a local man offered to buy coffee and doughnuts for the postal workers in the Belleville, IL, area to celebrate National Postal Workers Day (July 1). The man, Frank Pawloski of Belleville, also wrote letters to local papers expressing his appreciation. Though the postal workers were grateful for the offer of coffee and doughnuts, they asked Pawloski to send a donation to help tornado victims in Oklahoma City instead. Pawloski sent the Red Cross a check for \$500.

To give to the relief fund for Oklahoma City, send donations to Branch 458 Relief Fund, Branch 458, 221 S. Eagle Lane, Oklahoma City, OK 73128. *Contributions or gifts to the Branch 458 Relief Fund are not deductible as charitable contributions for federal income tax purposes.* **PR**