

New cell phone attachment to scanner



**Lew
Drass**

rural routes nationwide.) It says its intent is to put them in higher parcel volume places first so more mail pieces are scanned in near real time.

“The Postal Service is telling us that it plans to implement this technology in most units around the country by the end of the fiscal year. USPS says it is currently scheduled to deploy these cell phones to about 170,000 city and rural routes.”

The cell phone uses Bluetooth technology to wirelessly connect to the scanner. One concern we’ve received from letter carriers in the field is that the cell phone battery dies before they finish delivering their route. USPS says it is aware of the issue with the battery life in the cell phones and its engineers are working on a way to resolve the problem.

In the meantime, USPS is asking carriers not to turn the phone on until it is time to go to the street. It says its engineers are looking at other options like a larger capacity battery with longer life or possibly car chargers.

USPS told us if the phone battery dies, the information is not lost, it just downloads when the scanner is cradled, just as it does in places not using a cell phone.

Another reported concern from letter carriers using the phone is the “blackout” period while the phone and scan-

ner are sending information. The scanner and phone are transmitting data every 15 minutes or so. While this data is transmitting, the scanner cannot be used.

USPS told us that the information it received during testing was that it takes less than a minute for the data to transfer, but it acknowledged that this isn’t always true in reality. We discussed reports we’ve received about delays of a few minutes or longer in some cases while information is being transmitted through the phone, causing letter carriers to have to wait on the scanner.

USPS told us it plans to do a software update in June or July that it hopes will eliminate the blackout period so the data will transmit without interrupting use of the scanner. In the meantime, the USPS says it wants carriers to just use common sense in delaying or forcing the data transmissions and be patient during the blackout periods.

We also have received questions about the GPS capabilities of the new cell phones. We raised this issue at our meeting with the Postal Service. USPS says the GPS function is available anytime the phone is on. However, USPS says there are no plans at this time to use this new technology for operational purposes.

USPS told us the first phase of the cell phone use is about the business and scanning, not operational uses, such as keeping up with letter carriers. USPS agreed to let us know in advance if and when this changes. Since our meeting, we have received a few reports from the field that are contrary to what USPS told us.

If you discover that management in your town is using the GPS function for operational purposes, please let your NBA office know what is happening so they can forward the information to my office. I plan to schedule another meeting with the USPS later this month to get an update on the implementation of this new technology. I’ll let you know in an upcoming article what we find out.

This month’s Contract Talk shows the USPS stand-up talk given to letter carriers when this new technology is implemented in their delivery unit. It includes instructions on how to pair the cell phone with the scanner and use it on the street.

In closing, I just want to thank everybody for your efforts to make our food drive a success this year!