

# Intentional delaying of mail



**Christopher Jackson**

meeting in Jacksonville, FL. At this meeting, I discussed the issue of delayed mail and asked the branch presidents in attendance if these situations were happening in the offices they represent. We discussed some instances of this occurring, and since that meeting I have received several additional reports.

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**“One common issue is that of letter carriers being instructed to return to the office, regardless of whether they are finished with their delivery duties.”**

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One common issue is that of letter carriers being instructed to return to the office, be off the street, or be off the clock at a certain time regardless of whether they are finished with their delivery duties. At times, they are told to bring all of their mail back and to scan the non-delivered parcels as “No Access” or some other scan that doesn’t provide our customers with an accurate representation of why their package was not delivered that day.

Another issue is that of letter carriers being told to stop delivering letters and flats at a certain time and to only deliver parcels. Instructions such as these often are given to letter carriers before they leave the office in the morning, but they also are being delivered via text messages and calls to their personal cell phones. An increasingly common method for supervisors to send such instructions is by mass text messaging to all the carriers in the delivery unit through the Mobile Delivery Device (MDD).

**R**ecently, NALC was approached by the Postal Service to discuss the unfortunate problem of USPS supervisors delaying our customers’ mail. There were several reports of entire routes being uncovered for a day or of letter carriers being told to stop mail delivery at a certain time and bring the remaining mail back to the office. We were asked to help identify where these problems exist and then provide that information to USPS so it could attempt to correct the problems.

In March, shortly after the Postal Service asked us to help, President Fredric Rolando, Executive Vice President Brian Renfroe and I attended the Committee of Presidents

I meet weekly with several officials at USPS headquarters to discuss issues affecting letter carriers, including topics such as those described above. These officials have informed me that they are providing additional training to supervisors and managers regarding improper instructions to delay mail or to make inaccurate scans. While USPS officials at the headquarters level have the ability to identify potential problems through their own reports, they cannot catch everything, and that’s why they have asked NALC to help.

Certainly there are times where it is proper to bring back undeliverable mail due to unavoidable or hazardous circumstances such as animal interference, icy or snowy roads, missing mail receptacles, etc. However, in any situation where mail is not delivered, letter carriers should document the reason on PS Form 1571, Undelivered Mail Report. Section 442 of *Handbook M-41, City Delivery Carriers Duties and Responsibilities* addresses this as follows:

**44 Undelivered Mail: 442 Completing Form 1571**

442.1 - After return from trip, obtain Form 1571, *Undelivered Mail Report*, (see exhibit 442.1) from unit manager.

442.2 - Add any mail which was not delivered but was returned to the office.

442.3 - Sign the form and give it to a unit manager.

The form creates a record of the undelivered mail by listing the delivery unit where the letter carrier works, the route number the mail was supposed to be delivered on, the date of the incident, what type of mail and how many pieces, and the reason the mail was not delivered. Letter carriers always should request a copy of this form for their own records in case they are asked later about the undelivered mail. Article 41.3.G of the National Agreement gives letter carriers the right to a copy. It states:

Upon request, a duplicate copy of the completed Form 3996 and Form 1571, Report of Undelivered Mail, etc., will be provided the carrier.

If management refuses to provide this copy, letter carriers should ask to see their union steward for further investigation.

**If letter carriers are being instructed by their supervisors** to bring mail back to the office undelivered, they must follow those instructions. Such directives are very frustrating, but it’s important to stay calm and not argue with their supervisor, as this could lead to other problems. Letter carriers should do what their supervisor tells them, they should properly fill out PS Form 1571 for the undelivered mail, and they should inform a local NALC representative about the situation.

It is my hope that our local union representatives will, in turn, inform their national business agent (NBA) of these directives, so the NBAs can get that information to me. NBA contacts can be found on the NALC website at [nalc.org/regions](http://nalc.org/regions).