

# Breaking bad (habits)



Director of Education  
Jamie Lumm

**O**ver the years I've written several articles about practices that many carriers do, or are instructed to do, that violate postal regulations, often without them even knowing it. With so many new members, I thought it a good time to share a condensed version of those articles.

**Driving on sidewalks**—It seems silly to have to say this, but driving on public sidewalks is unsafe and, in most jurisdictions, it's against the law. However, in some places, management allows (or requires) carriers to do it as the designated delivery method on mounted routes when the mailbox cannot be reached from the roadway. Yet, Section 812.2 of the *Handbook M-41* requires carriers to “observe all traffic regulations prescribed by law. Rules applying to the public also apply to operators of postal vehicles.”

Clearly, if state or local ordinances prohibit the public from driving on sidewalks, these rules apply to postal drivers as well. Local management might claim that local authorities have given the OK for carriers to drive on the sidewalk to make deliveries, but the *M-41* states that rules applying to the public also apply to carriers. No exceptions are given. Besides, just because your supervisor claims something is true doesn't mean it is. Stewards should check with their local law enforcement agencies to find out the particular ordinance for their town or county.

**Skipping blocked mailboxes**—Some offices have a policy of skipping delivery when the mailbox is blocked by a car or some other obstruction. Carriers are told to bring the mail back and mark it as “box blocked”; it is not delivered until the obstruction is removed. This practice also is wrong and should cease. *Postal Operations Manual (POM)*, Section 632.14 states:

Where the approach to the mail receptacle located at the curb is temporarily blocked by a parked vehicle during normal delivery hours for the area, or snow or ice hampers the approach to the mailbox, the carrier normally dismounts to make delivery. If the carrier continually experiences a problem in serving curblines boxes and where the customer is able to control on-street parking in front of his or her mailbox but does not take prompt corrective action after being properly notified, the postmaster may, with the approval of the district manager, withdraw delivery service.

The *POM* makes it clear that if a box is blocked, the carrier must dismount to deliver the mail. This applies whether the box is blocked by a vehicle, a trash can or even snow. Delivery is withheld only if the problem is continual, i.e., repeated over a period of time, not occasional. Additionally, the customer also must have some control or ability to do something about the obstruction. Even then, delivery can be withheld only if the customer fails to remove the obstruction after being properly notified

and only if the postmaster has the approval of the district manager.

**Not attempting parcels**—With the huge increase in parcels, some carriers are pressured to save time by leaving them at the door (or at the apartment manager's office) without attempting to deliver them first. A variation of this is the so-called “knock and drop,” where carriers are told to knock on the door but not wait for the customer to answer before leaving the parcel on the doorstep. These violate Section 321.4 of the *M-41*, which states, “If a parcel does not fit completely within the mail receptacle or parcel locker (when available), determine if someone is available at the address by ringing the doorbell or knocking on the door.”

These instructions make it clear that delivery must be attempted at the customer's door. Only after it is clear no one is home are carriers authorized to leave the parcel in a protected location or leave a notice. Section 322.311a of the *M-41* states:

Parcels must not be left in an unprotected location such as a porch unless the mailer participates in the carrier release program by endorsing the package “Carrier-Leave If No Response” or the addressee has given written directions for an alternate delivery location. Examples of protected locations are a locked vestibule, locked hallway or with the doorman of an apartment building, inside a storm door of a residence, etc.

Thus, carriers may leave a parcel in an unprotected location when it is endorsed by the mailer “Carrier—Leave If No Response,” or in a protected location, such as at the manager's office of an apartment building, but only after attempting delivery at the customer's door.

**Making mounted deliveries with the vehicle in gear**—Postal regulations require that carriers take the vehicle out of gear and place the transmission in either park or neutral when making a curbside delivery. M-0994 National Level Step 4 provides:

...employees performing curbside delivery, from right hand drive vehicles, shall follow the procedures of: (1) on level streets or roads, placing the vehicle in neutral (N), placing the foot firmly on the brake pedal while collecting mail or placing mail in the mail box; (2) on hills, placing the vehicle in park (P), placing the foot firmly on the brake pedal while collecting mail or placing mail in the mail box.

Most carriers are unaware of this requirement. That's not surprising, because in most places the Postal Service does not teach it, even though the *USPS Standard Training Program for City Letter Carriers* instructs: “When delivering curbside mailboxes, place vehicle in neutral on level ground or in park when on a hill.” The reason is to prevent injury should the vehicle accidentally move while a carrier's arm is extended into the mailbox.

**Stewards should require managers to abide by their own regulations and cease instructing carriers to violate them.** They may try to claim that there's a past practice of doing otherwise, but a past practice does not override the clear and unambiguous language of the regulations.