

USPS consolidated casing: the good, the bad and the ugly



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USPS implemented a consolidated casing test in Annandale, VA, in May. Over the last six months, this test has expanded to test sites all over the country in every Postal Service area and NALC region. This month, I want to tell the membership what NALC has observed about the test process—the good, the bad and the ugly.

The good—Prior to the implementation of the test, President Rolando appointed eight NALC representatives from around the country to travel to Annandale to observe the initiative. These members spent approximately six weeks in Annandale and at NALC Headquarters, working on resources to assist local branch-

es once the test was expanded to additional sites. These original eight representatives also began training the observers who are now working in every office where the test is being conducted.

On April 24, NALC filed a national-level grievance challenging this USPS unilateral initiative. I am happy to report that this grievance is scheduled for arbitration next month. This is good news because it is rare for a national-level dispute regarding a test process to be adjudicated by an arbitrator while the test is ongoing. NALC is hopeful for a speedy resolution to this dispute.

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On Aug. 29, NALC filed a lawsuit regarding consolidated casing in U.S. District Court. The suit asks the court to issue an injunction stopping the Postal Service from continuing the consolidated casing test until NALC’s pending national-level grievance is resolved by an arbitrator. On Sept. 25, Judge James Boasberg heard oral arguments from representatives of NALC and USPS. Appearing on behalf of NALC, Peter D. DeChiara, of Cohen, Weiss and Simon, LLP, argued that many letter carriers are suffering and will continue to

suffer irreparable harm unless the consolidated casing program is halted by the court. The judge deferred his decision and asked the parties for additional written briefs. The requested written briefs were submitted the second week of October. As of the writing of this article, the judge has not issued a ruling; however, by the time you read this, we may have a decision in this case. Stay tuned to nalc.org and our social media platforms for updates on the lawsuit.

The bad—With the consolidated casing test process, NALC has observed a substantial amount of contractual violations in every test site. Traditional carrier cases have been replaced by consolidated cases with up to six routes in each casing group. Each casing group may have six shelves with single cell separations containing six or more addresses, creating cluttered work spaces, mixed up mail and confusion for both office caser/carriers and street carriers. Separation of traditional office and street duties, combined with lack of communication from management, has caused carriers uncertainty when making clock rings. Improper clock rings, operation codes and time allocation is creating flawed data in the test process.

In many test offices, USPS has unilaterally changed how city carriers take their two 10-minute breaks. Contractually, the branch has the option of choosing to have one break in the office during morning duties and the second break on the street. Under this test, USPS is mandating that office caser/carriers take one break in the office and take their other break on the street, while street carriers must take two breaks on the street regardless of what the branch has selected. The test process also showed that USPS is unilaterally choosing which carrier is an office caser/carrier and who is a street carrier without regard to seniority or personal preference, in violation of Article 41 of the National Agreement.

NALC observers have documented countless violations related to city carrier office duties contained in *Handbook M-41, City Delivery Carriers Duties and Responsibilities*. Many office processes have been unilaterally changed by USPS during the test in violation of handbook requirements. Hold mail processing, change of address requests, accountable item procedures, expanded vehicle safety inspections and route book maintenance are just some of the duties that vary from site to site. NALC observers have recorded instances in which carriers have been instructed to carry more than three bundles of mail on park-and-loop routes, or have been denied the right to case/route small parcels and rolls (SPRs) in the office. These are just a sample of the violations NALC has witnessed in test offices.

The ugly—While contractual violations are bad, the negative impact of consolidated casing to city carriers and

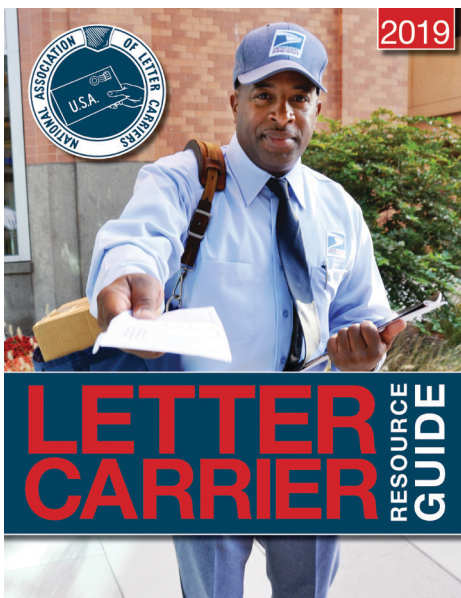
USPS customers is ugly. For many letter carriers, this test has involved 10-12 hour work days, mandated overtime in violation of the National Agreement and exposure to a wide variety of safety issues. Earlier/later start times and extended days have created extreme impositions on city carriers' lives and families. Affected carriers are reporting difficulties in obtaining adequate childcare, inability to attend important events and alienation from friends and family. In some test offices, carriers are herded like cattle down cluttered, congested, unsafe pathways. NALC has observed emergency exits blocked by test equipment, large quantities of staged mail and equipment blocking egress from the carrier cases, and increased length of exposure to inclement weather, all of which puts postal employees in danger. Letter carriers have reported increased feelings of anxiety, stress and frustration. Some carriers have reported sleep deprivation resulting from long hours and daily schedule changes. Additionally, other carriers report aggravated medical conditions because of the test. Peak season is upon us and it can be a stressful time for all postal employees. NALC is concerned that letter carriers involved in this test may face even greater challenges.

Carriers are not the only people suffering from the USPS consolidated casing test; postal customers and mailers are suffering as well. NALC has observed numerous customer service failings during the test, including entire routes not receiving delivery, presequenced mailings curtailed beyond requested delivery dates, and carriers instructed to disregard the address when delivering walk sequence and/

or marriage mail. Other issues include hold mail that is temporarily misplaced or not processed/resumed in a timely fashion, changes of address that are not being recorded, mail that does not get forwarded and businesses that are closed by the time the carrier arrives. NALC has witnessed Delivery Point Sequence (DPS) and Flat Sequencing System (FSS) mail being returned to the plant for "re-processing," creating delayed delivery.

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Despite all the undesirable results being reported, USPS has plowed ahead, adding more test sites each week. This unilateral USPS consolidated casing initiative will continue to be a hot topic of conversation until a resolution is achieved through either the grievance procedure or the court system. For more details on consolidated casing, read my articles in the May, July, and September 2019 editions of *The Postal Record*. For the most up-to-date information on consolidated casing, be sure to check nalc.org and our social media regularly.



The printed version of the 2019 *Letter Carrier Resource Guide* is now available to order

The 2019 *Letter Carrier Resource Guide*, a comprehensive guide for every letter carrier, combines, updates and replaces the 2016 *City Carrier Assistant Resource Guide* and the 2014 *Letter Carrier's Guide*. This new all-in-one guide was created to help all letter carriers obtain important information pertaining to every stage of their career. The guide includes updated rights and benefits, and relevant changes to these rights and benefits, as letter carriers progress from city carrier assistant to career status. The guide includes chapters on NALC structure, health benefits, pay, uniforms, workroom floor issues, community service, legislation and much more.

To order a printed version of the *Letter Carrier Resource Guide*, log on to the Members Only section of the NALC website, click the checkbox below the image of the guide and a copy will be mailed to your NALC address of record. To read or download the online version, visit nalc.org/resourceguide.