

Contract Administration Unit

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In the office

This month's Contract Talk will highlight some of the handbook provisions related to city carrier office duties. Letter carriers are required to perform certain tasks in the morning, before leaving for the route, and in the afternoon, upon returning to the office. During the route inspection and adjustment process, these tasks are given office time credit on the PS Form 1838-C, Carrier's Count Mail — Letter Carrier Routes Worksheet, and are included in the office time evaluation for each route. For more information on route count and inspection, read the April, May, June and July 2019 editions of Contract Talk. This article will explain some of the handbook provisions relating to office activities letter carriers should perform while clocked on office time.

Vehicle inspections—Letter carriers should ensure they inspect their delivery vehicle according to USPS Notice 76, Expanded Vehicle Safety Check every day before operating the vehicle. Vehicle inspections should be performed as soon as possible after clocking in to allow letter carriers to promptly report vehicle deficiencies to management. These requirements are found in Sections 832 and 842.1 of *Handbook M-41, City Carriers Duties and Responsibilities*.

832 Inspecting Vehicle

832.1 Inspect vehicle as described on Notice 76, Expanded Vehicle Safety Check (see exhibit 832.1) for deficiencies, body damage, or inoperable items. See section 842 for reporting defects.

842.1 Reporting Defects

Driver must (a) report all mechanical defects or failures and major body damage on Form 4565, Vehicle Repair Tag (see exhibit 842.1) as soon as noted, and (b) immediately turn in the completed form to a dispatcher or manager. Minor body damage can sometimes await repair until the next regular inspection and need not be reported more than once.

Section 922.51.f of *Handbook M-41* indicates how the time for vehicle inspections is credited on the PS Form 1838-C during the route inspection process. The minimum time allowance for performing vehicle inspections is three minutes; however, a proper vehicle inspection may take longer.

922.51 Actual Time Entries

f. Line 19, Vehicle Inspection. (1) Only those routes assigned a postal vehicle or a commercial contract vehicle will record this time. Generally, vehicle inspection is made promptly after recording your reporting time.

If you inspect the vehicle during the morning office timeclock rings, record the time on line 19. (2) However, if you pick up the vehicle at the garage and inspect it at that point, the time required is part of the garage time and is not recorded on line 19. (3) Vehicle inspection time is not allowed for a carrier who has a drive-out agreement or uses his/her own vehicle under contract.

Time Allowances for Carrier Office Work

19 Vehicle inspection see 922.51f. Base minimum allowance is 3 minutes.

As indicated in section 922.51, this inspection should be per-

formed as part of morning office duties and should receive office time credit accordingly. Notice 76 specifies letter carriers should perform Items 16 and 17 on the list with assistance from another person if possible. Vehicle inspections are an important part of maintaining letter carrier safety and should not be overlooked.

Hold mail—Letter carriers have certain responsibilities when it comes to processing hold mail. Mail may be held for many reasons, including customers temporarily away or a 10-day hold in anticipation of processing a change of address. The procedures for processing hold mail vary based on the type of mail and the reasons for the hold. These procedures are explained in depth in Chapter 2 of *Handbook M-41*. Whatever the reason mail is being held, letter carriers should process this mail on office time.

Handbook provisions instruct management to have letter carriers retain hold mail at the carrier case. This language is found in section 117 of *Handbook M-39, Management of Delivery Services*:

117.1 Workroom Floor Layout

k. Hold Mail. Instruct the carrier to place hold mail in a central location **only** when space is not available at the carrier's case.

Accountable items/special services mail—Accountable items are keys, postage due, customs duty and special services mail. Letter carriers receive these items in the morning from the accountable clerk. These items are handled in accordance with Section 261 of *Handbook M-41*.

2 Office Time — Preparation

261 Accountability Procedures

261.1 Acquiring Accountable Items

261.11 Accountable items are keys, postage due, customs duty, and special services mail.

261.12 Generally, carriers are required to call at the finance cage for accountable items. They may be called in groups by call of route numbers or by passing a paddle (see glossary for paddle system). At some offices, the items are delivered to the carrier at his/her case.

During route inspections, carriers receive office time credit for processing accountable/special services mail. Section 922.51 of *Handbook M-41* discusses time credit for these items:

922.51 Actual Time Entries

a. Line 14, Registered, Certified, COD, Customs, Express Mail, and Postage-Due; Keys; Form 3868; Signing For, Returning Funds and Receipts. Record the combined time (1) to travel from the carrier case to the place within the work unit where registered, certified, postage-due, COD, and customs mail is obtained — unless these articles are brought to you; (2) to sign for these items and make returns of receipts or funds; and (3) to return to the carrier case or (where local conditions warrant) to return to the vehicle from this location. If the locations where these various kinds of mail are processed are widely separated, total the time required at each location and record on line 14. Also include in the total on this line the time for obtaining and returning keys. If accountable mail is delivered at the carrier case, record the time used to accept and sign for the articles. If accountable mail is identified while

In the office (continued)

performing street duties, whether it is delivered or returned, the carrier will receive the actual time for clearance of the piece.

This handbook language makes it clear that the processing of these items should be credited to office time. Letter carriers should ensure that they are on office time when handling accountable items, whether in the morning before leaving for the route or in the afternoon upon returning.

Rest breaks—City letter carriers are entitled to two paid 10-minute rest breaks during each eight-hour workday. One of these rest breaks may be taken in the office on office time if your local branch has chosen this option.

The negotiated two 10-minute break periods are the required minimum. Longer breaks may be established by past practice or by the local memorandum of understanding (LMOU). Letter carriers are required to take the negotiated breaks. The *Joint Contract Administration Manual (JCAM)* on page 41-28 explains this requirement as follows:

National Arbitrator Britton ruled that the Postal Service must ensure that all employees stop working during an office break. Contractual breaks must be observed and cannot be waived by employees (H4N-3D-C 9419, Dec. 22, 1988, C-08555).

If your branch has chosen an office break, letter carriers must take this break on office time. During the route inspection process, letter carriers receive credit for this office break on the PS Form 1838-C, and it is included in the office time evaluation for each route. This requirement is found in Section 922.51 of *Handbook M-41*, which states:

922.51 Actual Time Entries

e. Line 18, Break (Local Option). Enter the scheduled office break period, if applicable.

Note: At the option of the local union, the carriers at the delivery unit will receive one 10-minute break period in the office (rather than two such 10-minute breaks on the street). Such break will be scheduled by the employer.

Letter carriers should never skip their negotiated rest breaks whether they are taken in the office or on the street.

Office time—return—Oftentimes, afternoon office duties can be unclear for city letter carriers. This section explains the order in which letter carriers should perform afternoon office functions. Management in some offices will insist that letter carriers complete their afternoon office duties in a designated amount of office time or in some cases on street time. *Handbook M-41* directs letter carriers to clock to office time first and then perform these additional office duties. This requirement is contained in Chapter 4 of *Handbook M-41*, reprinted in relevant part here.

4 Office Time — Return

41 Use of Timecards

412 PSDS Offices

Follow instructions in 211.2 — except (1) set dials to indicate “R.S.” for Return Street and (2) set dials to indicate “E.T.” for End Tour.

Section 211.2 indicated here refers to the procedures for clocking-in using the EBR available in most postal facilities. This time clock transaction is the first handbook procedure to be completed by letter carriers upon returning to the office. Section 127.a of *Handbook M-39* reinforces this requirement:

127 Office Work When Carriers Return From Route

The carrier unit managers must observe and direct carrier activity when carriers return from the route. Observe such things as:

- a. See that carriers promptly clock in on return to office.
- c. See that clerks are available to check in accountable items as efficiently and promptly as possible.

As indicated, handbook provisions state carriers should clock back into the office immediately after unloading their vehicle and before disposition of collected mail.

42 Disposition of Collected Mail

Place the mail collected on designated table or in receptacles.

Sorting of outgoing collection mail and all other end-of-day activities should be conducted on office time.

Letter carriers should also return accountable items to the clearing clerk for proper clearance while on office time as indicated in section 43 of *Handbook M-41* and Section 127.c of *Handbook M-39* cited above.

43 Clearance for Accountable Items

- 431 Keys
- 432 Registered and Certified
- 434 CODs
- 435 Customs Duty Mail
- 436 Postage Due

Processing of undelivered mail also should be performed on office time, whether this mail is processed in the morning or in the afternoon upon return from the route. Section 44 of *Handbook M-41* explains this requirement:

44 Undelivered Mail

441 Processing Undelivered Mail

Follow procedures listed in part 24 to process forwardable and undeliverable mail (1) that you didn't process before leaving the office and/or (2) that you picked up on route. After processing, place this mail in throwback case, as explained in part 24.

These are just a sample of the activities letter carriers should do on office time. Letter carriers should ensure that they are making proper clock rings to reflect these tasks. In-depth explanations of office functions and their route inspection time credits are found in the *NALC Route Protection Program*, available on the NALC website at nalc.org/routeadjustments. Members also may request a copy of *The NALC Route Inspection Pocket Handbook* from their national business agent or through the NALC Supply Department.