

# Occupational disease claims



Assistant to the President  
for Workers' Compensation  
Kevin Card

**I**t is clear that 2020 has been a tough year for all of us, especially letter carriers. As the pandemic has swept through the country and the Postal Service, tens of thousands of letter carriers have been quarantined. As letter carriers were quarantined, those still working continue to endure mandatory overtime, with many working six or seven days a week. All of that extra work takes a toll on our bodies.

With insufficient rest periods, your body may not be able to heal from daily micro-traumas. Small aches and pains can develop into occupational injuries. Letter carriers who develop such occupational injuries should file a Form CA-2 claim.

Successfully filing a CA-2 for an occupational disease is a multi-step process. The first step is to write a work narrative explaining your day-to-day duties as a letter carrier so that your doctor can write a medical report connecting specific work factors to your diagnosed conditions. A good work narrative describes an average day on your route.

Mail volume and deliveries fluctuate every day, so avoid exact numbers. Describe how long you sort and deliver mail. Estimate mail volumes, weights, distances and repetitions. Never exaggerate. Use action words that describe your work factors like walking, carrying, reaching, pushing, pulling, etc. Be sure to put your name, address and phone number on the work narrative, and sign and date it.

**The next step is to take a copy of your work narrative to your doctor.**

A medical report from your doctor needs to describe the causal relationship between specific work factors and the diagnosed injury. The report needs to be based on objective medical evidence, such as physical exams, tests, X-rays or MRIs. A good report describes the physiological mechanism by which specific work factors caused, aggravated or accelerated the diagnosed condition.

It's important that your doctor know that your work does not need to be the primary cause of your injury. Letter carrier work duties often accelerate minor medical conditions, making them worse. Injured workers should advise their doctor that the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP) treats acceleration just like direct causation. Doctors often use the word "exacerbate" when the word "accelerate" is more appropriate.

A medical report diagnosing acceleration needs to explain how, absent your work duties, your diagnosed condition(s) would not have worsened. Given the heavy nature of our work, doctors can document the acceleration of diagnosed conditions.

The doctor's report must list the diagnosed condition(s) and state his or her opinion with "reasonable medical certainty." Reasonable medical certainty is a bureaucratic term required by OWCP. A suitable medical report does not have to be lengthy; all the necessary information can be on one or two pages. That makes it easier for OWCP claims examiners, too.

**Once you have the medical report describing the causal relationship between your work and your medical condition, you can take the next step and register in ECOMP, OWCP's web portal, and then file the claim.** Instructions on how to register and file claims via ECOMP can be found at [nalc.org/workplace-issues/injured-on-the-job](http://nalc.org/workplace-issues/injured-on-the-job).

As you fill out the CA-2 online, you will come to Question 11; it asks for the date that you first became aware of the disease or illness. You can use the date your condition was diagnosed. Question 12 asks the date you first realized the disease or illness was caused or aggravated by your employment. That will be the date your doctor signs the medical report.

You should file the CA-2 as soon as possible, preferably within 30 days from the date listed in Question 12. However, the CA-2 will meet the statutory time requirement if filed no later than three years after the date of your last exposure to the work factors that caused the injury.

**The Postal Service is required to send your CA-2 to OWCP** within 10 working days of receiving it from you. Filing the claim via ECOMP can expedite Postal Service compliance. Once OWCP gets your CA-2, it will assign you a claim number and send you a letter. You can track the processing of your claim on your ECOMP dashboard.

You should upload any medical reports directly to OWCP using ECOMP. Do not give your medical reports to the Postal Service and expect it to send them to OWCP. Instructions for uploading documents also can be found on the NALC website's "Injured on the Job" page.

Many letter carriers struggle with occupational diseases and don't file claims. You have the right to be compensated for your on-the-job injuries. Exercise that right and file a claim.

**I want to thank you for all of the good work you have done** during this difficult year. May you have a safe and peaceful holiday season.

