

# Bravery in the face of danger



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**L**etter carriers face many dangerous situations every day while serving the American public. The escalation of the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates how dangerous a letter carrier's job can really be. Letter carriers interact with the public on a regular basis, increasing the potential exposure to this deadly virus. I want to use this month's article to discuss some of the dangers that letter carriers bravely confront, and to thank you for rising to the challenge.

Recently, letter carriers all over the country have experienced major changes in the way we deliver mail. Many letter carriers are working in conditions unlike any experienced before. Carriers are now wearing medical gloves, masks or face coverings; cleaning and sanitizing their postal vehicles and workspaces; and socially distancing themselves from their co-workers. Carriers who normally have substantial interactions with customers now must remind themselves and their customers of the need for social distancing. These extra measures, while necessary, can make a letter carrier's job significantly more difficult.

Many letter carriers are now sacrificing personal relationships to try to stifle the spread of COVID-19. I have heard reports of letter carriers living separately from their spouses or children due to fears of exposing them to the virus. Letter carriers in some locations are dealing with the grief of having lost family members, co-workers or friends to this virus. Yet these carriers willingly return to the workplace, continue their duties and face the pandemic while delivering essential life-saving medications, personal protective equipment, cleaning supplies and vitally important stimulus checks.

**COVID-19 is just one of the many dangers letter carriers may encounter.** In recent months, there have been reports of letter carriers being shot and killed, physically assaulted or robbed at gunpoint while performing their duties. Sadly, these reports, while still uncommon, are becoming more frequent. Some of these assaults have occurred while letter carriers are delivering mail in the dark. Letter carriers should not have to worry about these types of dangers while delivering mail, but unfortunately it is a reality some may face. These letter carriers woke up expecting a typical day, full of positive interaction with customers while earning a living wage to provide for their families, only to be faced with a frightening situation beyond their control. Even in these difficult times, letter carriers persevere and continue to provide exceptional service.

Letter carriers deliver mail and parcels seven days a week, which means a lot of time spent driving a delivery vehicle.

Many letter carriers may work up to 12 hours a day on the street operating their vehicle. Increased time in the vehicle and on the street increases the opportunity for letter carriers to be involved in motor vehicle accidents, sometimes with devastating results. Letter carriers have been struck by cars while walking their routes, crossing the street or reloading a satchel with mail. Some letter carriers have suffered severe physical and emotional injuries from being involved in a motor vehicle accident while on their route. As the USPS delivery fleet ages, reports of fires in postal vehicles also are becoming more common. Despite the increased risk of motor vehicle accidents and fires, letter carriers get behind the wheel, walk their routes, and perform their duties with willing professionalism and dedication.

One constant danger facing letter carriers is the possibility of dog attack. Oftentimes, unrestrained dogs will become aggressive and harm letter carriers. According to USPS statistics, 5,800 postal employees were attacked by dogs in 2019; many of those employees were letter carriers out on their routes. The third week of June is National Dog Bite Awareness Week and USPS will be reminding customers to keep the family pet secured. Customers with dogs should remind their children not to accept mail directly from their letter carriers, as the dog may view the carrier handing mail to a family member as a threatening gesture. I encourage letter carriers to always take every precaution to protect themselves from dog attacks. Letter carriers should always report aggressive animals on their route and complete warning cards, which should be cased with residual mail, as well as ensuring that management enters alerts into the MDD to warn replacement carriers of any potential hazards.

Due to COVID-19, there has been a decline in letter and flat mail and a 30 to 50 percent increase in parcels, which has resulted in less time spent in the office preparing the mail and more time spent on the street. Understandably, these increased street times can create additional wear and tear on the body and may lead to a rise in on-the-job injuries. Letter carriers often experience injuries to knees, ankles and hips from the additional time spent on the street. Increased time on the street may also require letter carriers to be exposed to extreme temperatures for longer periods of time, potentially creating another source of on-the-job injuries. Extreme heat can lead to heat exhaustion or heat stroke, while extreme cold can cause hypothermia and debilitating frostbite.

**On-the-job injuries, dog attacks, motor vehicle accidents and fires, physical assaults and, recently, the COVID-19 pandemic are only some of the dangers letter carriers face.** Letter carriers proudly tackle the challenges of these increased dangers to provide essential mail service to every address in the nation. I am proud of every one of you. Your commitment to service is one reason that the United States Postal Service is America's most trusted government agency. Thank you for your unrelenting dedication and perseverance.