

# Significant changes in OWCP claim handling



Assistant to the President for Workers' Compensation  
Kevin Card

**P**ostal Service employees file more workplace injury claims than do workers at any other federal agency. In Fiscal Year 2020, more than two-thirds of all federal claims were filed by postal employees, and due to the physical nature of our work, letter carriers represent the bulk of Postal Service claims. Injured letter carriers have more interaction with the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP) than do employees of all other federal agencies combined.

OWCP recently introduced significant changes in the way claims are handled. Historically, OWCP has created and assigned cases across 12 district offices based on geographical jurisdiction. Claims were generally assigned to the district office based on the claimant's home address.

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Over the last couple of years, OWCP has been moving from a regional- and geographical-based structure to a more centralized organization. Operations and policies have been realigned to improve lines of communication, eliminating barriers and distinctions between the national office and the 12 district offices.

To improve efficiency, OWCP began a new system on Sept. 28, wherein case assignments in the program no longer will be assigned using geographical jurisdictional rules. Instead, claims examiners now will handle cases based on a rotational assignment model, regardless of the claimant's geographical location.

These changes are intended to level claims examiner case-loads and equitably distribute cases to provide consistent case processing across the country. As the coronavirus pandemic compelled all claims examiners to work from home, they no longer need to live near an OWCP district office. OWCP expects that the reorganization will allow increased flexibility in the hiring process.

Two years ago, OWCP restructured the duties of claims examiners, making them responsible for all facets of claims adjudication. Prior to that change, different procedures, including paying compensation or reviewing medical evidence in a

claim, may have been handled by several claims examiners. Requiring all claims examiners to handle all facets of a claim challenged OWCP staff, and some claims examiners left the agency. This has led to an influx of new claims examiners, who have a lot to learn to become proficient in OWCP procedures.

**In another effort to provide a more streamlined decision-making process, OWCP eliminated the position of senior claims examiner and created a new position of quality assurance manager.** Historically, senior claims examiners have been used differently, with many engaged in more routine claims examiner duties. The new role will focus primarily on helping to ensure the quality of claims examiner work, as well as mentoring and developing the new staff. This is a welcome change.

**In another important change, OWCP has eliminated phone numbers specific to each district office.** Every call to a claims examiner now goes to a centralized phone number: 202-513-6860. Phone calls will be answered from 9:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except for federal holidays).

Claimants need their nine-digit OWCP file number, so they can be connected to the right claims examiner. OWCP expects claims examiners to immediately answer 25 percent of incoming calls. If you leave a message, OWCP expects claims examiners to respond to claimants within 48 hours.

In the past, claim file numbers began with a two-digit prefix from their respective district office. Due to the nationalization of claim assignments, most newly created OWCP cases will begin with the prefix “55.”

**In another effort to improve customer service delivery, OWCP has changed the way it communicates with claimants who have registered in the ECOMP web portal.** Those claimants now have real-time access to information about their claim, and can electronically receive and respond to letters from OWCP directly through their ECOMP dashboard.

If OWCP sends you a letter requiring a response, it now will appear in the ECOMP dashboard under the “Action Required” tab. Claimants can respond online and attach documents to their response. When a claimant responds to a letter from OWCP electronically, the response will automatically be uploaded into the case file. If there are any overdue items requiring a response, a red alert icon will appear next to the case file number under the “Cases” tab, also found at the bottom of your ECOMP dashboard.

The same alert icon next to the “Action Due Date” will appear for each overdue item listed under the “Action Required” tab. A video tutorial explaining the process is available in ECOMP's help menu under “User Guides/Injured Worker/Introduction.”

**The burden of proof in every OWCP claim is on the injured worker, who needs to be mindful of the daily status of his or her claim and promptly respond to every request from OWCP.**