

Reducing CCA injuries



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Every now and then, problems pertaining to Postal Service employees get examined by an outside entity. Earlier this year, multiple congressional committees asked the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to review service issues caused by the Postal Service's increased use of non-career employees, including city carrier assistants (CCAs). In August, the GAO released a report on the rising number of workplace injuries suffered by non-career postal employees. The report is titled "Further Analy-

sis Could Help Identify Opportunities to Reduce Injuries among Non-Career Employees."

The report examined the rates of non-career employee turnover and injuries, as well as the Postal Service's efforts to manage these issues. The GAO analyzed Postal Service data from Fiscal Years 2016 through 2020 to determine turnover and injury rates, and conducted analyses to determine what factors could be attributed to the two issues. The GAO also calculated the costs associated with turnover and injuries, including workers' compensation costs, using Department of Labor data.

As part of the process, the GAO interviewed officials representing the Postal Service, postal unions, postal management associations and the Postal Service Office of Inspector General. Postal Service officials asserted that injury rates had nothing to do with career status.

The GAO disputed the Postal Service's assertion and found that non-career employees had higher injury rates in the study period and that the Postal Service failed to analyze injury data by career status.

The GAO noted that one cause of the increase in non-career injuries was managerial pressure, in the form of unrealistic expectations to either intentionally accelerate work speed or because the manager did not account for an employee's relative lack of experience. Little surprise there, eh?

The GAO noted that CCAs may be particularly susceptible to such pressure because they want to keep their jobs in a vulnerable situation. The GAO was provided several examples of risks that CCAs may take under management pressure: failure to curb wheels, failure to put on seat belts, running instead of walking and jumping fences. The GAO also found that CCAs are more likely to be moved around to different installations, forcing them to carry unfamiliar routes and exposing them to hazards they may not know about.

At the end of the report, the GAO recommended that the postmaster general ensure that executive leaders analyze employee injuries by career status to identify op-

portunities for reducing employee injuries, particularly among non-career employees.

Injured workers deserve more than further analysis to solve an obvious problem.

While NALC is working with the Postal Service to address many of the issues in the GAO report, there are things we can do to help our newest employees avoid injuries so they can move toward career employment. The Postal Service would never get the mail delivered without our CCAs. If we want to return to reasonable staffing, reducing turnover and injuries for our newest employees is essential.

We all have experienced the stress of being on probation and learning how to carry mail. While we cannot change management's attitude toward CCAs, we can change ours. We need to make sure that our CCAs get the time to work safely and learn how to do the job right. There is no substitute for solidarity on the workroom floor.

Letter carriers continue to have the highest injury rate of any federal employee. Our new CCAs need to know that every letter carrier, regardless of their seniority, is protected for workplace injuries, and that reporting and being compensated for a workplace injury is a fundamental right, regardless of their probationary status.

Postal reorganization

NALC is concerned that the recent postal reorganization may cause delays in claim processing by the new USPS Occupational Health Office (formerly Health Resource Management). As the districts have been downsized, so has the staff dedicated to handling Postal Service obligations under federal workers' compensation laws and regulations. While the staff may have gotten smaller, the number of claims has not.

The Postal Service has strict time limits for processing the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP) claim forms. Both the law and the contract require management to complete and transmit Forms CA-1 and CA-2 to OWCP within 10 working days after receipt from the employee. Form CA-7 must be transmitted to OWCP within five working days after receipt from the employee. Delays in processing forms should not be tolerated. Postal Service obligations in processing OWCP claim files are incorporated into our national contract, and delays in processing claim forms are grievable.

Injured letter carriers who are registered in OWCP's ECOMP system can track the processing of claim forms by checking their ECOMP dashboard daily. Letter carriers with older claims who have not registered in ECOMP are strongly encouraged to do so, as the system now allows users to review complete claim file documents in real time.

May you all have a safe and healthy holiday season. Thank you for the great work you do every day.