

New year tests and updates



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Another peak season is thankfully behind us and, as always, letter carriers have exceeded expectations—not only in the delivery of mail and parcels, but also in the delivery of holiday cheer. The media is full of stories about letter carriers providing heroic rescues, making charitable efforts and having positive interactions with homebound or sheltering customers. I am so proud of the strength, perseverance and remarkable courage that carriers have displayed during these extraordinary times.

With peak season and the pandemic, USPS is experiencing continued increases in parcel volume. I want to use this month's article to discuss a new parcel initiative and a unique software issue related to the Mobile Delivery Device (MDD) and parcel delivery.

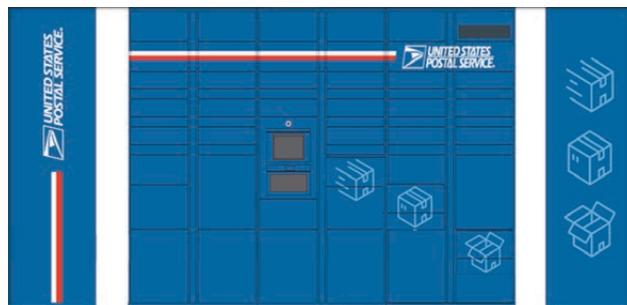
Smart Locker test

As parcel volume rises, the Postal Service consistently explores initiatives involving alternate parcel delivery options. USPS hopes to improve the customer experience by providing more secure and efficient delivery options, as well as by reducing first-attempt failures. One recent initiative about which the Postal Service has communicated to me is a test partnership with locker manufacturer Smarte Carte.

In this partnership, USPS has commissioned 11 Smart Locker units which have been installed at various postal locations in the Northern Virginia District. These self-serve units are various-sized parcel lockers, in which USPS may place parcels for customers to access. The Smart Lockers are installed either in the lobby or outside the delivery unit, and are available to customers around the clock.

Letter carriers will attempt to deliver parcels using normal delivery procedures. During the test, if parcel(s) cannot be left and the parcels will fit in the Smart Locker, the letter carrier will make the appropriate scan on the MDD and leave a modified PS Form 3849. Multiple parcels may be scanned to the same PS Form 3849, if the parcels will fit in one locker. The letter carrier then returns the parcels to the delivery unit at the end of the day and places them in the area designated for Smart Locker placement. In the evening or the next morning, a clerk will load these parcels into the Smart Locker for the customers to retrieve them.

The modified PS Form 3849 left by the carrier explains to the customer that the parcels are available in the Smart Locker located at the customer's local delivery unit. Each PS Form 3849 has a barcode and associated numeric code that the customer can input on the Smart Locker computer screen to retrieve his or her parcels from the Smart Locker. If the parcels do not fit



A rendering of Smart Locker units

in the available locker space or requires identification verification, the screen will display a message instructing the customer to visit the retail counter to retrieve the items.

This test began in December in the Northern Virginia locations. At this time, USPS has not provided an end date for the test. I will continue to provide information to the membership as this test progresses.

MDD address errors

Over the past several weeks, I have received reports from letter carriers describing an error involving the MDD and parcels. These carriers have reported that when they scan the USPS tracking barcode, the MDD displays a different address than what is on the parcel. For example, the parcel is addressed to 100 Indiana Ave.; however, when the carrier scans the barcode, the MDD displays 160 Indiana Ave. Additionally, in some cases, the MDD also will generate an alert that warns carriers that they may not be at the correct delivery address, and asks whether they are sure that they want to deliver the parcel at this location.

I requested that the Postal Service investigate this issue and provide me any related information. USPS states that this discrepancy between the actual parcel address and the scanned address on the MDD is sporadic and involves parcels that are accepted at the retail counter.

Based on the information received from the Postal Service, this error occurs because the two software systems—the retail system and the MDD software—have a communication issue that causes the MDD software to recognize only the ZIP+9 that indicates the sector segment or block range on the route, rather than the ZIP+11 that identifies the specific address. The MDD then displays the first address contained within the sector segment or block range and generates the alert to the carrier to verify the delivery location.

USPS believes that this error occurs only with parcels that are accepted at the retail counter and that customer tracking information is not affected. It appears that this error impacts only letter carriers and the MDD. USPS is working to resolve this software communication issue and letter carriers, as always, should deliver the parcel as addressed. MDD alerts can be a useful tool for carriers, and hopefully this issue will be resolved quickly.