

Reporting requirements and PS Form 3996



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One of the responsibilities nearly all letter carriers have on a daily basis is the process of estimating their workload each morning. When a carrier is of the opinion that he or she cannot complete the assignment in the regularly scheduled time, letter carriers and managers have responsibilities to fulfill. Every few years, I've written about this topic and offered advice for letter carriers on how to best handle this routine.

Handbook M-39, Handbook M-41 and several national-level settlements have defined a process that both letter carriers and managers are required to follow when a letter carrier cannot complete his or her daily assignment within their normally scheduled time frame. Some detailed advice that covers a variety of situations on this subject can be found in the "DOIS Projections, PS Form 3996 and PS Form 1571" section beginning on page 85 of the 2019 *NALC Letter Carrier Resource Guide*. It also is available in the "Resources" section of the NALC website under "Workplace Issues." Some basic advice on how letter carriers can best handle these situations is below.

- 1. Orally inform your manager:** Sections 131.41 and 131.42 of *Handbook M-41* require you to orally inform your manager when you believe you cannot carry all the mail distributed to your route in eight hours or within your normal schedule.
- 2. Request PS Form 3996:** Section 122.33 of *Handbook M-39* requires the manager to provide you with a PS Form 3996 when requested. When you request a 3996, no matter what your manager says to you, say, "I am requesting a 3996," and explain the reasons for your request. If you are denied the form, immediately request to see your shop steward.
- 3. Fill out the form completely:** It is important that you fill out the form completely. In the "reason for request" box, write down why you believe you cannot complete your assignment in eight hours. Fully explain the reasons for your request. General comments such as "heavy volume" or "route overburdened" are not enough in this section.

Sometimes managers will tell you that you don't need the requested overtime or auxiliary assistance because of what DOIS projects for your route. Multiple national-level settlements (e.g., M-01664 and M-01769) have held that these time projections are not the sole determinant of your daily workload. Nothing can replace the opinion of the professional letter carrier. Simply provide your best estimate and the reasons why, and move on to the next step.

- 4. Keep your cool:** While this process can be frustrating, you will do nothing to help yourself by becoming angry. If your manager denies your request for overtime or assistance, tell him or her that you will do your best. Politely ask what you should do if you are not able to deliver all of the mail, and return to the office when he or she wants you back.
- 5. Don't argue:** There is no reason to argue with your manager at this point. The best thing you can do is tell your manager that you will do your best and ask for a copy of your 3996. Finish your office work and go to the street. All you have to do is your best. Work professionally. Never compromise your safety or skip breaks or lunches to make it back to the office by a certain time.
- 6. Don't make decisions:** Letter carriers get paid to deliver mail. Managers get paid to make decisions. If you realize that you will not be able to deliver all the mail and make it back to the office by the time the manager has approved, you should do everything you can to put any further decisions in the manager's hands. The best way to handle this situation is to call your supervisor, per local instructions. If you have no local instructions, try calling approximately two hours before the time you are scheduled (approved on PS Form 3996) to be back. Let your supervisor know where you are and how long you think it will take you to finish. Ask whether he or she wants you to bring the mail back or finish the route. Follow whatever instructions your supervisor or manager gives you.

If the supervisor or manager refuses to tell you what to do with the rest of the mail, or if you can't finish your assigned duties in the amount of time initially specified by your supervisor, you should return to the office in the allotted time and ask for further instructions. Again, you should follow whatever instructions your supervisor or manager gives you.