

You haul 16 tons and what do you get?



Assistant to the President
for Workers' Compensation
Kevin Card

The USPS Office of Inspector General (OIG) recently released a report that examined how changes in the mail mix, specifically the increase in parcel volume, have affected letter carriers' physical health by leading to more workplace injuries. Some of the findings may not be surprising to many of you.

The report noted that online sales have been a main driver of the parcel delivery growth, which surged nearly 200 percent between 2010 and 2021. The increasing package volumes, along with a decline in First-Class Mail, changed the composition of mail processed through Postal Service's delivery network.

For the period from January 2020 through September 2022, for every 2,000 pounds of packages a carrier delivered in a quarter, the average injury rate increased by an average of 4.4 percent. This percentage is significant, considering that each carrier handled and delivered about 8,800 pounds per quarter, on average. That's an average of over 16 tons of parcels delivered by a letter carrier every year.

Are CCA turnover, understaffing and workplace injuries all related? The OIG report did not address those issues. The OIG made one very limited recommendation, calling on the USPS vice president of human resources to "develop and implement standard operating procedures outlining how a carrier should safely handle and deliver a heavy package (weighing 35 pounds or more)."

Despite the limited recommendation by the OIG, how can we as workers change our work culture to reduce injuries to our newest colleagues? That question goes to the core of what made the union movement in the first place—workplace solidarity.

When I carried mail, it was not uncommon for career letter carriers to tell new probationary employees that they should never report an injury or they would never pass probation. If that attitude still prevails, and injured city carrier assistants are not reporting injuries, it's likely the OIG's numbers do not reflect the true magnitude of injuries suffered by our newest letter carriers.

There is an old saying, attributed to the Industrial Workers of the World: "The bosses' brains are under the workers' hats." The OIG's report found that senior letter carriers suffer fewer injuries. Our senior letter carriers may be the best qualified to teach our newest employees how to carry the mail safely. The OIG report makes obvious the need for new and senior letter carriers to help each other learn how to work safely and avoid injuries.

A unified workforce that looks out for each other and shares insight on how to do our jobs safely could be our solution to the problems raised in the OIG report. When possible, we should work with local management to help our newest colleagues learn how to perform their letter carrier duties safely.

Section 818 of the USPS *Employee and Labor Relations Manual (ELM)* suggests that the Postal Service develop safety, health and ergonomics awareness and promotional programs. Given the OIG's findings, this is a perfect opportunity to bring up ergonomics in meetings with management.

After serving the last nine years as the assistant to the NALC president for workers' compensation, I am retiring. I appreciate NALC leadership's support of me and for the injured NALC members we represent. No other public-sector union helps its injured workers like the NALC. We have a great union that deserves your continuing support. Keep up the good work, brothers and sisters, and remember, an injury to one is an injury to all.

"No other public-sector union helps its injured workers like the NALC. We have a great union that deserves your continuing support. Keep up the good work, brothers and sisters, and remember, an injury to one is an injury to all."

Total package weight delivered had a bigger impact on newer carriers with less than one year of tenure than on more experienced carriers.

Some differences between age brackets emerged in the data. Specifically, the average carrier injury rate was highest for carriers between the ages of 40 and 55. On average, 4 in 10 injured carriers (39.8 percent) were between the ages of 40 and 55, which was slightly higher than the percentage of all carriers in that age range (36.0 percent). In contrast, the injury rate was lower for carriers younger than 40 years of age or older than 55.