

Requesting leave— Make sure you get what you deserve

Over the years, the Postal Service has expanded the ways in which letter carriers can request leave. Much of the process has been automated, including the completion of the PS Form 3971, Request for, or Notification of, Absence. Being able to use multiple methods and having additional options for submitting and obtaining approval for leave requests is convenient. However, city letter carriers need to be cautious when submitting leave, completing the PS Form 3971, or signing any computer- or management-generated leave forms. This article will explain the methods for submitting leave requests and the possible pitfalls of the automated processes.

Article 10 of the National Agreement covers general leave provisions such as choice of vacation period, vacation planning and sick leave. Article 10, Section 2 specifically incorporates *Employee and Labor Relations Manual (ELM)*, Section 510, which contains all the rules and procedures related to the Postal Service leave program.

Article 10, Section 2. Leave Regulations

The leave regulations in Subchapter 510 of the *Employee and Labor Relations Manual*, insofar as such regulations establish wages, hours and working conditions of employees covered by this Agreement, shall remain in effect for the life of this Agreement.

ELM Section 511.23 requires all USPS employees to complete PS Form 3971, Request for or Notification of Absence when requesting or using any type of leave.

ELM Section 511.23 states:

Postal employees:

a. Request leave by completing PS Form 3971, Request for or Notification of Absence.

b. Obtain approval of PS Form 3971 before taking leave — except in cases of emergencies.

Both the requesting employee and the supervisor have responsibilities when using PS Form 3971. Appendix B of the National Agreement talks about these responsibilities in Section 3. It states:

Form 3971, Request for, or Notification of, Absence

1. Purpose. Application for annual leave is made in writing, in duplicate, on Form 3971, Request for, or Notification of, Absence.

2. Approval/Disapproval. The supervisor is responsible for approving or disapproving application for annual leave by signing Form 3971, a copy of which is given to the employee. If a supervisor does not approve an application for leave, the disapproved block on Form 3971 is checked and the reasons given in writing in the space provided. When a request is disapproved, the reasons for disapproval must be noted. AWOL determinations must be similarly noted.

If you have a dispute regarding your leave request, provide a copy of the PS Form 3971 to your shop steward or NALC branch officer so they can investigate and correct the problem.

All letter carriers may request leave by submitting a physical PS Form 3971 to their supervisor, but there are other options as well. In addition to using PS Form 3971 to request leave in person, you can also use the Enterprise Leave Request Application (eLRA) to generate a PS Form 3971 and electronically inform your supervisor of your leave request.

The eLRA is accessible through the USPS LiteBlue site using a computer, smartphone or other mobile device. Carriers can log into LiteBlue and select the eLRA icon from the “Employee Apps” section. You can then

follow the on-screen prompts to enter your leave information. Be aware that by clicking “Submit,” you are authorizing your electronic signature on the 3971 and confirming that the information you provided is accurate and complete. When you click “Submit,” this 3971 will be electronically sent to your supervisor for them to review and approve. The application is designed to provide both the carrier and the manager with a record of the request. Always keep this record in case verification of the request is needed later. This confirmation can be helpful in settling disputes over a leave request.

If you have an emergency or an unexpected illness, another option for requesting leave is the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system. Typically, the IVR is used only when you need to report an unscheduled same-day or next-day absence. Keep in mind, there are a limited number of postal locations where IVR is unavailable, so check with your shop steward to verify if your office uses the IVR.

Employees can call the IVR at 877-477-3273 and select Option 4 when prompted. The system will ask you to enter your Employee Identification Number (EIN), so have it ready. The IVR will also ask you to specify the reason for your absence and the amount of time you expect to take. For example, if you have the flu and expect to be out for three days, you should specify “illness or injury” and “24 hours.” Some other options of unexpected reasons for requesting leave might include “personal emergency,” or “Wounded Warrior.” Also, if you are reporting your illness the morning before your shift and expect to miss one day, you should report “today” as both the start and end dates. Once your call

