

Changes in conflict with handbooks and manuals



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In this month's column, I will discuss recent notifications from the Postal Service that may be affecting carriers across the country. Additionally, I will provide an update on proposed changes to the *Handbook M-41, City Delivery Carriers Duties and Responsibilities*.

eLRA, stand-up talk and postcard

In September 2024, NALC received notification that USPS had updated the Enterprise Leave Request Application (eLRA). The eLRA is an online application that employees can use to request unscheduled leave in the event of an emergency or unexpected absence. The update includes a feature for adding an electronic signature to the PS Form 3971, Request for or Notification of Absence generated from the leave request. Employees will become aware of this new feature only by reading the brief message that pops up on the application just before they complete the leave request:

By clicking Submit, you are authorizing your electronic signature on this 3971 and confirming the information you provided is accurate and complete. Upon clicking Submit, this 3971 will be submitted for your supervisor's review.

← Prev Submit ✓

⌂ Cancel

This update affects every employee and conflicts with postal handbooks and manuals. Section 142.32.d of *Handbook F-21, Time and Attendance*, along with Sections 512.412 and 513.332 of the *Employee and Labor Relations Manual (ELM)*, require employees to complete their PS 3971 upon their return from an unscheduled absence. If any supervisor or manager instructs you to sign the form electronically, request a shop steward and file a grievance.

My staff and I met with the Postal Service to discuss this update. I explained my concerns regarding the new feature. The Postal Service acknowledged that applying an electronic signature is now a requirement when using the eLRA, but it also emphasized that the application is only an "option" available to carriers, which they are not obligated to use. USPS explained that carriers can choose to use the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) phone system and complete a PS Form 3971 upon their return to duty instead. I shared details of this meeting with NALC regional offices and advised representatives to file grievances on the application, where appropriate.

The eLRA update has become even more of a concern following receipt of a recent notification from USPS. In May, the Postal Service explained that they were disseminating a mandatory stand-up talk (SUT) to remind employees of sick leave policies in Section 513 of the *ELM*. A postcard was also mailed to employees reiterating information from the

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How to Request Sick Leave

Postal Service employees are expected to maintain their assigned schedule and make every effort to avoid unscheduled absences. If you need to use sick leave, follow these guidelines:

If...	you...	according to ELM section
Requesting sick leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ must use PS Form 3971; Enterprise Leave Request Application (eLRA)■ get approval from your supervisor in advance, except for unexpected illness or injury.	513.331
Sick leave absences exceed 3 consecutive days	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ must submit medical documentation or other acceptable evidence of incapacity for work, or of the need to care for a family member.	513.362
You need Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) time off	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ must give your supervisor PS Form 3971 or submit electronic PS Form 3971 via eLRA at least 30 days before the absence. If 30 days' notice is not practicable, notice should be provided as soon as practicable.	515.51
Leave is for planned FMLA medical treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ should first check with your supervisor about the timing.■ must make a reasonable effort to schedule the treatment so as not to unduly disrupt the Postal Service's operations.	515.51

For more information on leave policies, see the *Employee and Labor Relations Manual (ELM)*, section 510.

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SUT. Unfortunately, the SUT and postcard include a requirement that employees use the eLRA for scheduled/

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Emergency action plans and fire drills (continued)

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1910.39(d) Employee information. An employer must inform employees upon initial assignment to a job of the fire hazards to which they are exposed. An employer must also review with each employee those parts of the fire prevention plan necessary for self-protection.

Chapter 850 of the *ELM* lays out management's responsibilities, which are drawn from the above controlling regulations.

851.1 Installation Heads - Installation heads are responsible for implementing emergency action plans and a fire safety program for the protection of people, mail, and Postal Service property. This is required by 29 CFR 1910, Subparts E and L. This program must include (but is not limited to):

- a. Training,
- b. Education,

- c. Inspection,
- d. Enforcement,
- e. Drills,
- f. Emergency evacuation teams,
- g. Written emergency action plans,
- h. Written standard operating procedures for hazardous materials releases, and
- j. Fire prevention plans as required in this subchapter.

After reviewing the cited information above, ask yourself whether your employer is following the regulations as written. If not, bring it to the attention of your union representatives.

Keep an eye on each other and get involved.

Changes in conflict (continued)

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unscheduled leave and implies that this requirement is consistent with the *ELM*. To be clear, the eLRA is not mentioned anywhere in the *ELM* or *Handbook F-21*. The postcard is misleading and misrepresents provisions of the *ELM*.

Proposed revision to *Handbook M-41*

In the January 2025 edition of *The Postal Record*, I discussed revisions proposed by USPS to Section 812.31 of *Handbook M-41*. The Postal Service stated that the revisions were being made to reflect evolving safety policies related to the Next Generation Delivery Vehicle (NGDV). They explained that the NGDV had been designed with safety features that require all doors to be closed when the vehicle is in operation. As described, the NGDV's design would not permit carriers to operate the postal vehicle with its sliding cabin door open under any circumstance that is inconsistent with Section 812.31 of the *M-41*. Due to this inconsistency, USPS proposed the following revision (in bold):

When traveling to and from the route, when moving between park and relay points, and when entering or crossing intersecting roadways, all external vehicle doors must be closed. When operating a vehicle with sliding driver's cab doors on delivery routes and traveling in intervals of 500 feet (1/10 mile) or less at speeds not exceeding 15 MPH between delivery stops, the right-hand sliding cab door may **not** be left open **under normal operation**.

Although the Postal Service cited the design of the NGDV in its reason for proposing this change to the handbook, there was no mention of the NGDV in the proposed revision. As written, the revision would apply to all postal vehicles, not just the NGDV. This would change the way many letter carriers have delivered from postal vehicles, such as the Long-Life Vehicle, for decades.

Subsequently, a modification was made to the NGDV's design bringing it into compliance, and the proposed revisions have been rescinded. See my January 2025 *Postal Record* article for more information on this topic.

I will continue to provide updates on these important matters. Be sure to read my article each month and visit nalc.org for the latest information.