

Performance Optimization Deployment Support observation



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In November of 2024, a letter carrier in NALC Region 12 was observed by an unidentified Management Safety Team, which had determined by their observation that the employee was not wearing a seat belt. The carrier was placed on emergency suspension. As of the writing of this column, a grievance was filed and remains pending resolution.

In early December, NALC Headquarters was advised that management had held a stand-up talk in NALC Region 2, informing carriers that there is a new national program involving the observation of letter carriers by upper management in unmarked cars.

We were provided with a document that highlights the following three immediate action triggers observed by a Performance Optimization Deployment Support (PODS) employee:

[U]nnattended running vehicle, not wearing a seat belt, or distracted driving (fingering mail, headphones/earbuds, utilizing cellphone), the PODS is instructed to stop the employee, secure the vehicle, contact local management and stand by to see that the emergency placement procedures are followed. Before these managers got in their surveillance vehicle, it was pre-determined (in writing) that any of the listed infractions would result in an emergency suspension.

What is a PODS? This is not defined in the materials we had received, but the word makes me think of the movie "Alien." Not good!

The PODS employees are directed to identify top opportunity offices using their analytics. Once a deployment location is identified, they utilize route summary information to look up carrier breadcrumbs to guide them to your current location.

On Dec. 12, I made an inquiry to USPS Headquarters Labor Relations regarding this program. No one was able to answer any questions. That same day we received a copy of postal management's "PODS" PowerPoint.

The documentation establishes that management at the headquarters level had unilaterally created this new program, whereby these PODS employees hunt down letter carriers to pounce on them in an effort to determine if they are in compliance with safety instructions.

A copy of the PowerPoint was sent to USPS to make sure that everyone is referring to the same information.

On Dec. 17, the USPS provided notice to the NALC of this new program with no attachments to explain how it would work.

As a direct result of what was discovered, the NALC's Contract Administration Unit staff prepared the April 2025 Contract Talk, which covers "Safety blitzes, street supervision and disciplinary action." Please download, save and use that information to assist your stewards in responding to these management observations.

On Feb. 27, this correspondence was assigned to me. We reviewed all the material associated with this program and prepared questions to begin our discussions and met with management on March 19.

In our meeting with management, the following was explained to us:

1. This was a program, created by operations at the headquarters level, designed to assist the districts due to accident and fatality rates.
2. The PowerPoint that the NALC had acquired on Dec. 12, 2024, (see above) is to be or has been retracted. (Note: The NALC's opinion is that this documentation proves that discipline was ordered from the very top of this organization by managers who want to punish our carriers into submission.)
3. Management indicated that their safety engagement team has been instructed not to use their personal vehicle. We were advised that all team members are assigned a government vehicle and that no team members are authorized to use their own vehicles. They emphasized that there should be no covert observations.
4. By letter dated March 31, the USPS provided the NALC with a new and improved program (sanitized) following our meeting.
5. We were informed that any of the information discovered or collected while their team is in the field will be turned over to local management, which will make the decision on what action to take.

There are a few items that may need to be further addressed. However, what management has established

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PODS observation (continued)

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from the headquarters level is a program to ensure compliance with safety.

To that end, I offer the following: Every single letter carrier should at all times be focused on performing their duties safely.

The April 2025 Contract Talk gives you contract references to address how management should conduct itself when conducting street supervision. The following *M-41* references are provided to remind you of the rules that apply to city letter carriers:

- §112.4 **Safety**
Conduct your work in a safe manner so as not to endanger yourself or others (see 133 for general safety practices and 812 for vehicle safety practices).
- §133.2 Do not finger mail when driving, or when walking up or down steps or curbs, when crossing streets, or at any time it would create a safety hazard to the carriers or to the public.
- §812.4 Do not finger mail while driving or hold mail in your hands while the vehicle is in motion. You must use mirror to check for pedestrians ahead, in back, and on both sides before placing the vehicle in motion.

We should never touch the mail at any time when the vehicle is in motion. Both hands should be on the wheel. When we get to the next delivery point, and once we are safely stopped, only then do you touch the mail to prepare the next delivery.

Never finger the mail while crossing a street or when walking up or down steps. That is the rule that we all agreed to.

Never finger the mail when doing so would create a hazard to you or the public.

- §321 Peel off the letters and circulars for the first house from bundle carried in the hand, and the flat mail from bundle standing on end in satchel.

This rule was created so that you could focus your full attention on walking safely. If you carry your flats on your arm, you are blocking your view of the area in which you are walking. When I began my career, my station manager did not believe in my opinion of the above rule. We fought over it until the national parties reached a Step 4 settlement, H1N-5C-C-1155 (M-00039), which states:

It is not a requirement for a carrier on a foot route to carry 4 inches of flats on his arm while delivering mail. Carriers may opt to carry flats on their arm, unless instructed not

to, as part of their daily routine, provided there is no loss in carrier efficiency.

- §832.1 Inspect vehicle as described on Notice 76, Expanded Vehicle Safety Check (see Exhibit 832.1) for deficiencies, body damage, or inoperable items. See 842 for reporting defects.

Please take note of the importance of conducting your vehicle inspection every single day. You and only you are the last person to make the decision whether the vehicle is safe or not. Too many times, we take a pass on the inspection and in some situations, we later regret it.

While we speak of safety, there is a distraction that must be addressed on an ongoing basis. How you are treated by your supervisors/managers affects your ability to do your work safely. If you are mistreated in ways that are prohibited by the Joint Statement on Violence and Behavior in the Workplace (JSOV), you and others are being put in harm's way. Your emotions, when victimized by supervisors/managers who should instead be prison guards, might make it impossible for you to see, hear and/or feel danger around you.

In an arbitration decision dated Nov. 3, 1997, (C#17542), Arbitrator Rehms opined as follows on the matter of abusive treatment by an offending OIC:

The conjunction of safety concerns and undue levels of stress in Postal workplaces in these few sentences quoted from the Joint Statement is obvious. When a Union steward comes to a supervisor and complains that an OIC has threatened, bullied, and harassed Postal employees by words and actions, that is, a complaint of a Safety and Health violation that can properly be raised as a Step 2 grievance under Article 14.2 (c) of the National Agreement. The rejection of this argument in Management's Step 3 answer to this grievance (Jt.Ex. 2, p. 3), is simply an example of 'winks and nods, or skepticism' as the framers of the Joint Statement feared that some of the Service's 700,000 employees might take it. I do not accept Management's Step 3 answer.

If your manager has treated you in a manner that clouds your ability to work safely, you need to approach your union representatives and seek help.

Branches should continue to file grievances as necessary on any disciplinary actions.