

# The Winter 2026 *NALC Activist*: Grieving management's OWCP mistakes revisited



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In January, the NALC published a special edition of the *NALC Activist*: Grieving management's OWCP mistakes revisited. Copies of this *Activist* can be downloaded at [nalc.org/workplace-issues/resources/body/Winter-2026-Activist.pdf](http://nalc.org/workplace-issues/resources/body/Winter-2026-Activist.pdf).

Helping our injured brothers and sisters is fundamental to our identity as members of the NALC. Section 7 of the National Labor Relations Act gives us, as union members, the right to engage in concerted activities for mutual aid

and protection. The Supreme Court based our Weingarten rights on this language: "mutual aid and protection." There are also no better words than these to describe the work we do when we help our injured members; it lies at the core of who we are as a union.

While providing mutual aid and protection involves assisting our members with filing and maintaining OWCP claims, it also involves filing grievances to protect them from management's abuses, especially its failures to follow its legal and contractual obligations toward its injured employees.

Twenty years ago, the entire Spring 2004 *NALC Activist* was dedicated to grieving management's OWCP mistakes. Before this seminal publication, many NALC local leaders and shop stewards erroneously believed that the union could not grieve issues involving the Postal Service's handling of OWCP cases. Thanks to the *Activist*, filing grievances on management's mishandling of OWCP cases has become a routine part of many shop stewards' arsenals. And now it's time for an update!

Since the 2004 *Activist*, however, there have been major changes not only in OWCP's policies, but also in how claims are processed both by OWCP and the Postal Service. Many of the most common management mistakes in claim processing in the 2004 *Activist* are now much less common, while other mistakes and problems have become more prevalent. What hasn't changed is that postal management routinely mishandles claims. And those mistakes result in delays and claim denials that harm our most vulnerable members.

The Federal Employees' Compensation Act (FECA) is intended to protect federal employees by providing compensation when they suffer job-related injury or illness. The law places the burden on the injured worker to prove that the injury is work-related. While the OWCP claims process is supposed to operate efficiently and

to result in fair, accurate decisions, the procedures required to meet that burden are often complex and difficult to navigate.

For many, the OWCP claims process fails to deliver the benefits intended by FECA. Letter carriers know that too many legitimate claims are challenged by management or become unnecessarily complicated due to management mistakes in handling claims.

As a result, some letter carriers suffer on-the-job injuries but fail to obtain the protections of FECA. Management's mistakes lead to some of the worst injustices to injured letter carriers who seek workers' compensation benefits.

The FECA requires management to process claims in accordance with regulations, but frequently supervisors do not. Supervisors' mistakes often result in legitimate claims being delayed or even denied. Their mistakes also violate the law, as well as postal regulations and the *National Agreement*.

Activists and shop stewards should not allow postal management, through its own errors, to transfer the costs of legitimate on-the-job injuries onto letter carriers and their families. They should educate their supervisors and managers concerning their legal and contractual obligations when a letter carrier reports an on-the-job injury. Then they should enforce those obligations through the grievance process.

This enforcement will promote the safety and welfare of every NALC member by encouraging the Postal Service to correct unsafe working conditions. The Postal Service will also benefit because it will learn the true cost of maintaining a safe and healthy workplace.

The Postal Service should pay the full cost so it can make informed decisions about investing to prevent injuries. USPS is a numbers-driven organization. If it determines that it is spending more on letter carrier on-the-job injuries than it would cost to prevent those injuries, then it will act to make the needed ergonomic changes in letter carrier work.

Finally, of course, the individual letter carriers who have experienced on-the-job injuries will benefit. Their legitimate claims will more likely be accepted by OWCP, and they will enjoy the medical care and financial protection intended by the FECA.

Almost all of us—as activists, branch representatives or shop stewards—will be called upon at some point in our careers to walk a mile in the shoes of an injured brother or sister. The NALC's goal through the new *Activist* is to make that walk a little easier, and to make the mutual aid and protection that we render to our injured members a lot more effective.