

# PARK POINT SAFETY

BY DEAN JONES

Between October 1996 and March 2014; four letter carriers were killed, while twelve others were severely injured, with most not able to return to duty. All but one of these accidents occurred while the carriers were working the mail from the rear of their vehicles.

As letter carriers there are many safety challenges we face each and every day that demand our attention and awareness. One of those is park points.

Park point locations generally are at an intersection of two streets intending for 4 relays. This limits the amount of vehicle movements. Mail volumes, terrain, curb line boxes, traffic, safety, average lot frontage, and eliminating deadheading may cause some variations.

**In preparing this article I had the privilege to speak with a few carriers willing to share their message.**

Dan Hohenstein from Denver, CO Branch 47, was struck by an inattentive teenager. The teenager was driving an SUV at 30 miles per hour when he struck Dan and pinned him between his vehicle and the SUV -- crushing his legs. Dan estimates that he lost \$80,000 to \$100,000 over the course of 3 ½ years, because he no longer can work on the overtime desired list. Dan also had another career besides being a carrier. He was a high school and college hockey referee for 25 years and can no longer referee. Dan needs more surgery which includes a knee replacement. He stated that he was given little sympathy from management. In fact, they have been threatening his job since he has returned to duty.

**Dan would like every carrier to know -- even if you think you are parked in a safe spot, do not take anything for granted. Always be aware, use your flashers and limit how much you work from the back of the vehicle.**

July 17, 2012 at 2:50 PM Letter Carrier Keith Wagner of Branch 79 in Seattle, was struck after he had just closed the back of his van. An impaired driver hit a car that was parked behind his vehicle. Keith's initial injury was an open fracture in his left leg that affected his tibia and fibula. Weeks and months later, he started having complications in both hips, back, right knee, both shoulders, and a blood clot in his left leg below his knee to his waist that took 4 surgeries to resolve.

**Keith would like you to know to be constantly aware of dangers and don't put yourself in harm's way. He hasn't worked since his accident and**

**with 2 more surgeries to go his return is still unknown.**

Joel Cabrera of Branch 1100, San Gabriel, CA was struck while working the mail from the rear of his vehicle on May 14, 2013. Joel said, *"I think it must have been 4 days after the accident when I woke up in my hospital bed thinking that I had had a bad dream. But it wasn't a bad dream. My worst fears were realized when I took a look at my legs and saw a mangled jumble of flesh. I was about to embark upon a grueling schedule of orthopedic surgeries and drug induced experiences normally reserved for battlefield soldiers."*

**Joel's message for you--is to evaluate the safest park point locations and make the necessary changes for the sake of those letter carriers who have no idea what kind of hardship they could endure.**

David Betts from Exeter, NH Branch 44, on March 21, 2014, was struck by a distracted driver who was picking up sandwich off the floor of his car. That resulted in a collision that tossed David into a tree squeezing him between it and the vehicles. He ended up with a 7 to 8 inch laceration on the left side of his head and his scalp was peeled off of his skull. The head injury required daily draining for a week. He had a bruised left foot, a separated shoulder, and blood clots in his left leg. However, the worst part of this whole experience was watching his pregnant wife deal with the trauma to their family. At 6'3" David felt helpless while watching his wife take care of all their responsibilities by herself.

**David Betts message is that accidents don't just affect you but they affect your family, co-workers, community and route you serve.**

In wrapping up, ask yourself these questions; 1) are my park points safe? 2) Are they exposed to heavy traffic? 3) Is there a safer place to park? Evaluate your park points with your supervisor's. If that effort doesn't correct the unsafe parking points then get the attention of your shop steward immediately.

I would like to give a special thank you to Dan Hohenstein, Keith Wagner, Joel Cabrera, and David Betts for sharing their stories— NOW GET THE PARK POINT MESSAGE OUT!!!!