OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

March 20, 2000

ROBERT T. DAVIS
VICE PRESIDENT, SOUTHEAST AREA OPERATIONS

GLORIA E. TYSON
DISTRICT MANAGER, ALABAMA DISTRICT

SUBJECT: Allegations of a Hostile Working Environment at a Post Office in the Southeast Area (Report Number LM-AR-00-001)

This report presents the results of our review of the allegations of a hostile working environment at the Tuscaloosa, Alabama, Post Office (project number 99EF071ER000). The report responds to a congressional request to review allegations about abusive managers who were allegedly harassing and intimidating employees at the Tuscaloosa Post Office.

The audit disclosed evidence that a hostile working environment existed at the Tuscaloosa Post Office. Alabama District officials had knowledge of the employees' concerns for about three years, but did not take action to investigate and correct employee concerns or respond to congressional inquiries in a timely manner. We recommended that the vice president, Southeast Area Operations, review the results of this audit and take appropriate action. We also recommended issuing specific guidance to prevent similar problems in other postal facilities in the Southeast Area.

Management's comments reflected general agreement with the recommendations. Although management did not agree that disciplinary action was warranted for the managers identified in the report, they agreed that corrective action was appropriate and identified the specific corrective actions initiated at the local level for these managers. In addition, the area issued guidance to district managers in an effort to prevent similar incidents at other facilities. Management's comments and our evaluation of these comments are summarized in the report.

1735 N LYNN ST

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies provided by your staff during the review. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact [redacted] or me at (703) 248-2300.

Billy Sauls

Billy Sauls
Assistant Inspector General
for Employee

Attachment

cc: Patrick R. Donahoe
Anthony J. Vegliante
Yvonne D. Maguire
John R. Gunnels

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Part I	
Executive Summary	i
Part II	
Introduction	1
Background	1
Objectives, Scope, and Methodology	2
Audit Results	
Hostile Working Environment	5
Verbal Abuse of Employees	6
Verbal Abuse by the Skyland Station Manager	6
Verbal Abuse by the Tuscaloosa Postmaster	7
Harassment and Intimidation of Employees	8
Unwarranted Discipline Issued to Employees	9
Postmaster's Response to Allegations	12
Skyland Station Manager's Response to Allegations	13
Workplace Climate Assessment	14
Increased Risk For Violence	15
District's Response To Findings of a Hostile Working Environment	18
Recommendations	19
Management's Comments	19
Evaluation of Management's Comments	21
District Knowledge of Labor-Management Problems at the Tuscaloosa Post Office	22
District's Response to Findings of Knowledge of Labor-Management Problems at the Tuscaloosa Post Office	25
Recommendations	25
Management's Comments	25
Evaluation of Management's Comments	25
Appendix A. Management's Comments	26
Appendix B. Guidance to District Managers	28

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This report presents the results of our audit of allegations of a hostile working environment at the Tuscaloosa, Alabama, Post Office.[1] Our objective was to determine if evidence supported allegations of abuse, harassment, and intimidation by management officials. Employees initially made the allegations to a member of Congress, who forwarded them to the Office of the Inspector General (OIG).

Results In Brief

Our audit disclosed evidence that a hostile working environment existed at the Tuscaloosa Post Office. Evidence supported allegations that the [redacted], and a [redacted] engaged in verbal abuse, harassment, and intimidation of employees. In addition, there was evidence that these managers singled out 13 employees for unwarranted discipline. All the employees we interviewed perceived management as unfair and unreasonable. An internal workplace assessment of the Tuscaloosa Post Office conducted by the Alabama District indicated that the [redacted] and the [redacted] set a negative tone for relationships with employees and contributed to a hostile working environment.

We obtained evidence of verbal abuse, harassment, and intimidation from employees who independently corroborated one another, and from a workplace climate assessment conducted by the Alabama District. Of the 36 individuals who provided sworn statements, 29 identified instances of verbal abuse, including cursing, screaming, yelling, insults, threats, and use of provoking language. All 36 employees described numerous specific corroborated instances in which management harassed and intimidated employees.

[1] The Tuscaloosa Post Office also includes the Downtown, Skyland, Eastside, and University Stations.

We also found evidence that the [redacted] and the [redacted] issued unwarranted discipline that resulted in monetary awards and settlements, totaling about $70,000 in back pay to 13 employees. The back pay awards and settlements resulted from unsupported discipline that was overturned in the grievance-arbitration process or by the Merit Systems Protection Board. Consequently, employees perceived management as unfair and unreasonable in issuing discipline.

The evidence suggests that there is an increased risk for violence in the Tuscaloosa Post Office. Seven of the thirty-six employees we interviewed expressed unsolicited opinions regarding their fears of the potential for violence in their workplace. These fears were based on their perceptions of the abusive management style practiced in the Tuscaloosa Post Office.

Alabama District officials had knowledge of employees' allegations of management misconduct for three years but did not take action to resolve them. Requests for inquiries into the employees' allegations were made by a congressman in December 1996, and the Postal Service Office of Government Relations in February 1998. District officials did not adequately respond to these allegations.

The allegations made by the employees were not adequately addressed because the Alabama District did not conduct a workplace climate assessment in the Tuscaloosa Post Office. This inaction on the part of district managers prompted this audit. The district could have avoided many of the issues in this report by using the fools available to them, such as the Threat Assessment Team guidelines, to address the employees' concerns and take corrective action.

Summary of Recommendations

We recommend that the vice president, Southeast Area Operations, review the results of our audit and take appropriate corrective and/or disciplinary actions. We also recommend issuing specific guidance to district managers that will prevent similar problems in other postal facilities in the Southeast Area.

Summary of Management's Comments	Management's comments reflected general agreement with the recommendations. Management did not agree that disciplinary action was warranted after applying appropriate standards and factors to the specific circumstances outlined in the report. However, management agreed that corrective action was appropriate and identified the specific corrective actions initiated at the local level for the managers identified in the report. In addition, the area issued guidance to district managers in an effort to prevent similar incidents at other facilities.
Evaluation of Management's Comments	Management's comments are responsive to our recommendations and their actions taken and planned should correct the conditions identified in this report.

INTRODUCTION

Background

Since 1992 Tuscaloosa Post Office employees have filed complaints about mistreatment by supervisors and managers. In 1996 employees began writing to their congressional representatives, voicing allegations of mistreatment, and seeking relief. For example, between 1996 and 1999, seven Tuscaloosa employees wrote to Congressman Earl Hilliard alleging management harassment and intimidation, and three employees wrote to Senator Richard Shelby with similar allegations.[2] In addition, a letter dated October 22, 1997, signed by 98 Tuscaloosa postal employees, was forwarded to both Congressman Hilliard and Senator Shelby. The 98 employees who signed this letter alleged that management used threats and harassment tactics against them. We verified that 84 of these 98 employees were still employed at the Tuscaloosa Post Office at the time of our audit, and that this number represented about 45 percent of the approximately 217 postal employees in Tuscaloosa at that time.

Beginning in 1996 and continuing through 1999 Congressman Hilliard contacted various offices within the Postal Service, including the Inspection Service, the Office of Media Relations, the Office of Government Relations,[3] and the OIG, requesting inquiries into the employees' complaints.

In January 1998 Congressman Hilliard contacted the Government Relations representative at Postal Service Headquarters and requested a review of management practices in Tuscaloosa. The 1997 letter signed by 98 employees prompted his request. In February 1998 the Postal Service Government Relations representative responded to Congressman Hilliard indicating that the manager of post office operations, Alabama District, with responsibility for the Tuscaloosa Post Office, had been requested to examine the employees' concerns. However, this letter did not specify when the Postal Service would provide a response to the congressman.

---

[2] Two of the three employees who wrote to Senator Shelby were among the seven who wrote to Congressman Hilliard.

[3] In early 1998 the name of this office was changed from the Office of Legislative Affairs to the Office of Government Relations.

In November 1998 after not receiving a response from the Postal Service for nine months, Congressman Hilliard requested that the OIG review the allegations in the "numerous letters and complaints received from employees over several years," including the October 1997 letter signed by 98 employees. The congressman advised us that he had requested inquiries during the past two years but had not received a satisfactory response. From the time the congressman first requested that the OIG conduct an inquiry in November 1998 until April 1999, employees continued to send letters to him alleging verbal abuse, harassment, and intimidation by management.

District officials told us they were not concerned by the allegations and did not intend to conduct an investigation. Accordingly, we decided to perform this audit.

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

Our objective was to determine whether evidence supported the allegations that:

- A hostile working environment existed in the Tuscaloosa Post Office.
- Management was aware of the alleged problems.
- Management had not taken action to correct the alleged problems.

To determine whether evidence of a hostile working environment existed, we followed Postal Service Threat Assessment Team procedures and contacted the Alabama District manager, the acting manager of Human Resources (who is the Threat Assessment Team coordinator), the senior labor relations specialist, and the employee and workplace intervention analyst. We described the nature of the employee complaints and related congressional inquiries, including the petition signed by 98 employees, and related OIG hotline reports. We then asked the district to provide us with information on how they responded to these allegations.

We conducted interviews in Tuscaloosa with 36 employees, taking sworn statements from each. These 36 employees included 15 randomly selected from the list of 98 who signed the October 1997 letter to Congressman Hilliard, and an additional 21 who came forward during our fieldwork. We interviewed four additional employees by telephone.

We originally selected 40 employees from the 98 who signed the October 1997 letter for our random sample of employees to be interviewed. Our intent was to project the information received from these employees to the universe of the 98 who signed the letter. However, because only 15 of the 40 randomly selected employees appeared for interviews, we were not able to do a statistical projection.

The 36 employees who were interviewed included 29 current craft employees, 6 former employees, and a former supervisor. To maintain employee confidentiality and to give employees an opportunity to speak freely and candidly, we conducted these interviews at a neutral location in Tuscaloosa during non-duty hours. This process was also used to minimize disruptions to postal operations.

To assess district and Tuscaloosa management's knowledge of the workplace climate in the Tuscaloosa Post Office, we interviewed the district manager, acting manager of Human Resources, employee and workplace intervention analyst, manager of Post Office Operations, senior labor relations specialist, Tuscaloosa postmaster, Skyland Station manager, and the Government Relations representative responsible for the Southeast Area.

We reviewed Inspection Service assault data, and referrals to the district's Threat Assessment Team, grievance data from the area and district Labor Relations offices, and Equal Employment Opportunity complaints from the Southeast Area Equal Employment Office of Compliance and Appeals. We also analyzed monetary awards and settlements paid through the grievance-arbitration process or the Merit Systems Protection Board.

In addition, we reviewed correspondence and related documents provided by congressional offices and Tuscaloosa employees, including several OIG hotline

complaints; policies and procedures relating to the Postal Service zero tolerance policy on violence in the workplace; Threat Assessment Team Guide, Publication 108; and applicable sections of the Employee and Labor Relations Manual, and the collective bargaining agreements.

From May through December 1999 we monitored the events at the Tuscaloosa Post Office and worked with district management to ensure that violations of the Postal Service zero tolerance policy, which we reported to the appropriate officials, were adequately addressed using the Threat Assessment Team Guide.

This audit was conducted from May 1999 through March 2000 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards, and included such tests of internal controls as we considered necessary under the circumstances. We discussed our conclusions and observations with appropriate management officials and included their comments, where appropriate.

AUDIT RESULTS

Hostile Working Environment

Our audit disclosed evidence that a hostile working environment existed at the Tuscaloosa Post Office. Evidence supported allegations that the [redacted], and a [redacted] engaged in verbal abuse, harassment, and intimidation of employees. In addition, there was evidence that these managers singled out 13 employees for unwarranted discipline. All the employees we interviewed perceived management as unfair and unreasonable. An internal workplace assessment of the Tuscaloosa Post Office conducted by the Alabama District indicated that the [redacted] and the [redacted] set a negative tone for relationships with employees and contributed to a hostile working environment.

The Postal Service Joint Statement on Violence and Behavior in the Workplace acknowledges that an unacceptable level of stress exists in some postal workplaces. The policy states that the Postal Service will not tolerate violence, threats of violence, harassment, intimidation, threats, or bullying, and that every employee at every level should be treated at all times with dignity, fairness, and respect.

The Threat Assessment Team Guide states that work climate issues and other contributing events may escalate the potential for violence. This guide designates each district's employee and workplace intervention analyst as a core member of the Threat Assessment Team, which has as its mission the prevention of workplace violence. One role of intervention analysts is to evaluate employee and workplace issues and concerns by conducting workplace climate assessments.

The Tuscaloosa postmaster told us that he believes the Tuscaloosa Post Office is a safe working environment and is not potentially violent. He acknowledged that a workplace climate assessment had not been conducted as of June 15, 1999 (the date of our interview with him).

When we told the [redacted] about the employee complaints against him, he told us that his personality style may be perceived as harassing and intimidating.

Employees told us that management's behavior created a hostile working environment and increased the risk of violence at the Tuscaloosa Post Office. Consequently, employees contacted the Inspection Service, the district Threat Assessment Team, the local congressional office, and finally the OIG, to report incidents of this hostile working environment.

Verbal Abuse of Employees

Our audit disclosed evidence that the [redacted] and a [redacted] verbally abused employees. This information was obtained from employees who independently corroborated one another, and from a workplace climate assessment conducted by the Alabama District. Of the 36 individuals with whom we spoke, 29 identified instances of verbal abuse, including cursing, screaming, yelling, insults, threats, and use of provoking language.

Verbal Abuse by the [redacted]

Twenty employees specifically identified the [redacted] as verbally abusive to them. For example:

- Eight employees described incidents in which the [redacted] yelled or screamed at employees, sometimes accompanied by threats against them. One employee described an incident in which the [redacted] was screaming at two employees "at the top of his lungs." Another employee told us that this [redacted] was "well known to verbally abuse employees and because he is one of the postmaster's chosen supervisors, he is allowed to continue his verbal abuse without fear of being reprimanded by management." Another employee said he witnessed an incident in which the manager was yelling and screaming at another employee in a very hostile manner and "appeared to have completely lost control of himself . . . he was waving his arms around and acting totally inappropriate." Finally, another employee stated, "He screams and belittles employees when they disagree with him, and he cannot control his temper."

- Our audit disclosed evidence that the [redacted] displayed insensitivity toward women by making comments about their ability and worth in the workplace. For example, one employee said that,

during a verbal altercation with her, the [redacted] Another employee said the [redacted] told her, [redacted] A third employee said the [redacted] told him that some of the women should be sent for fitness-for-duty exams and that some women should not have been hired. A fourth employee heard him say that if women could not handle the job, they should consider flipping burgers at a fast food restaurant.

- Another employee described an incident in which the [redacted] screamed and yelled at her and threatened to fire her. She told us that he then made disparaging remarks about her husband, a [redacted]

- Four employees stated the [redacted] has used verbal abuse in an attempt to provoke employees into physical confrontations. In documentation received by the OIG, one employee provided a written statement reporting that the [redacted] cursed at him. The employee said he asked the manager to stop treating him disrespectfully. After an exchange of words, the employee said the [redacted] told him: "I know you want to hit me, so do it." Another employee attested to this exchange in a sworn statement to the OIG. A third employee corroborated this incident in an October 1997 letter she sent to the Alabama District manager. In addition, a fourth employee stated that the [redacted] constantly threatened to fire employees and tried to provoke them to the point of fighting.

Verbal Abuse by the [redacted]

Eight employees specifically identified the [redacted] as verbally abusive. For example:

- A former supervisor told us that the [redacted] screamed at, cursed at, and threatened him in front of his subordinates and coworkers. Five employees corroborated this in their sworn statements to the OIG, including one who said she overheard the

[redacted] tell this supervisor he was "[redacted]."

- Another employee said the [redacted] told him that he was the "[redacted]." The employee told us that the postmaster made this statement in front of two supervisors.

- Finally, an employee told us that the [redacted] had screamed at her on several occasions, including a series of verbal tirades, which made her so fearful that she called the Inspection Service, the local congressional office, and the OIG.

Harassment and Intimidation of Employees

Our audit disclosed evidence that the [redacted] harassed and intimidated employees. All 36 employees who provided sworn statements described numerous specific corroborated instances in which management harassed and intimidated employees.

Seventeen of these thirty-six employees claimed they experienced or witnessed harassment and intimidation by the [redacted] For example:

- Two employees stated the [redacted] told employees in a standup meeting on the workroom floor, "[redacted]."

- Another employee told us that he successfully bid for, and later declined, a new position. According to the employee, after hearing this, the [redacted] approached him on the workroom floor, "got in his face," and told him that "[redacted] The [redacted] told the employee "[redacted]." This employee told us that the [redacted] was speaking loud enough for people in the area to overhear, and that he spoke in a "very hateful and intimidating way."

Five employees told us that the [redacted] engaged in harassing and intimidating behavior. One

employee told us that his letter-casing was counted numerous times in the past year—far more than any other employee in the Tuscaloosa Post Office.[4] He provided us with documentation of a grievance [redacted] As a result of this grievance, the discipline was overturned and management was ordered to pay the employee back wages, including overtime. The employee also told us, in reference to management issuing suspensions against another carrier, the [redacted] said to him, "[redacted]

In addition, employees told us these managers and other supervisors used their authority to intimidate employees. For example, two employees told us that people who question or disagree with supervisors are threatened with the night shift, or having their off days split. Five additional employees stated that supervisors threatened to change, and in some cases have changed, employees' working hours, shifts, and days off.[5] A former supervisor told us that after he reported falsification of records by a manager, the postmaster changed the former supervisor's days off, hours of work, and working locations.

Comments and behaviors of the type described above can create a workplace environment where employees fear for their jobs. In addition, these conflicts could escalate into a potentially violent situation in the workplace.

Unwarranted Discipline Issued to Employees

Our audit disclosed evidence that the [redacted] and the [redacted] issued unwarranted discipline that resulted in monetary awards and settlements totaling about $70,000 in back pay to 13 employees. The back pay awards and settlements resulted from unsupported discipline that was overturned in the grievance-

[4] Employees covered by a collective bargaining agreement may file grievances regarding wages, hours, and working conditions, in accordance with the provisions of the applicable agreement.
[5] The OIG recognizes that changing working hours, shifts, days off, and posting jobs for bid are subject to provisions of the collective bargaining agreements.

arbitration process or by the Merit Systems Protection Board.[6] Consequently, employees perceived management as unfair and unreasonable in issuing discipline.

Postal Service regulations and collective bargaining agreements govern discipline of postal employees. Discipline should be corrective in nature and not punitive. Moreover, all discipline must be supported by just cause and be progressive in nature, i.e. progressing from less severe to more severe.

Tuscaloosa postal management issued various disciplinary actions from 1995 through 1998, including letters of warning, suspensions, and removals, varying from 22 actions in 1996 to 29 in 1998. At least 19 of these suspensions and terminations were overturned on appeal between January 1995 and December 1998. As a result, the Tuscaloosa Post Office was required to restore back wages in excess of $70,000 to 13 employees.[7]

Employee sworn statements, Merit Systems Protection Board decisions, and arbitration awards indicated that discipline was often too harsh, not progressive, and inconsistently applied. Several examples included:

- An employee with over 30 years of service told us that he was subjected to an inordinate number of mail counts and that management harassed employees when they were eligible for retirement. He was suspended and offered a settlement, including back pay, if he agreed to retire within six months. He was issued a 14-day suspension and a 7-day suspension, both of which were overturned on appeal, resulting in a monetary settlement of $2,161.

- Nine employees who received seven-day suspensions had their discipline overturned and received back pay totaling over $7,500.

---

[6] Preference eligible employees have the right to file an appeal with the Merit Systems Protection Board if they are suspended for more than 14 days.

[7] This amount represents only those grievances filed for 7-day and 14-day suspensions and removals that were overturned in arbitration. This data was provided in part by the Tuscaloosa Post Office and the Alabama District Office, and in part by the Minneapolis Accounting Service Center. The payroll supervisor in Minneapolis told us that information from the Minneapolis payroll database does not include monetary settlements for lesser disciplinary actions because that system does not capture back pay data for actions involving less than 80 hours.

- Three employees were removed and subsequently returned to duty when they won grievances or other actions on appeal. One of these employees was removed three times and received back pay totaling about $24,000. The other two employees received back pay in the amounts of $9000 and $10,000.

- Another employee told us that, since he became active with his union several years ago, he has received six letters of warning, five suspensions, and was removed once. All of these actions were reversed on appeal. When he was removed, he was reinstated to his job after six months, and received back pay totaling over $17,950. This employee believed that he was singled out because of his union activities and claimed he has been harmed financially, emotionally, and physically by management's actions.

In addition, one current and two former employees told us that they were removed or terminated by management for unjust cause or for unexplained reasons. In one case, an employee said that she [redacted] With no warning, management told her to sign a removal notice. The next day, she was called in again, told the first notice contained a clerical error, and was asked to sign a second removal notice. In effect, she felt as though she was fired twice in two days. However, after she filed an Equal Employment Opportunity complaint and a grievance, management agreed to drop the proposed removal and change her job assignment to accommodate her medical restrictions.

Two former employees told us they were terminated during their probationary period for unknown reasons without formal counseling or an opportunity to correct any deficiencies as required by postal regulations. The first employee said that the supervisor told her she was "doing okay" but just needed to "improve her time element." Soon afterwards, the supervisor called her into his office, said she was not working out, and told her to clock out and go home.

The second employee said she was terminated during her probationary period three days after receiving compliments on good performance from her supervisor. She told us she received no counseling for poor performance prior to her termination.[8]

Management has the right to issue discipline. However, discipline should be corrective rather than punitive, as required by the collective bargaining agreements. The evidence obtained during this audit indicated that much of the discipline issued did not comply with this requirement.

[redacted]

Response to Allegations

According to the [redacted], the employee allegations against management were untrue. He said that employees made allegations because management was making tour changes, decreasing hours of work, and implementing other operational changes due to workload demands. He stated that these workload demands resulted in changes in job assignments, including the reposting and rebidding of positions.

The [redacted] told us he was aware of and supported the Postal Service zero tolerance policy for employees and supervisors. He stated that employees were told to go to work and were not verbally abused or harassed. He said that he believed in making people do their job. He added, however, that his management style was a "very hands-off approach" with his supervisors and therefore it is possible that some of the supervisors did some things that were improper or not in compliance with the zero tolerance policy. He told us that when employees complained to him that the supervisors harassed them or used abusive language with them, his approach to these situations was to "talk things through with the supervisor." He said that, typically, he did not document the employee complaints or the issues discussed with the supervisor. If the supervisor's abusive behavior continued, however, he said he documented the matter in order to take appropriate action.

The [redacted] stated that Tuscaloosa Post Office supervisors disciplined employees when appropriate. He

---

[8] The OIG recognizes that management has the right to separate employees within the 90-day probationary period, and that probationary employees do not have access to the grievance procedure. This provision is spelled out in Article 12 of all postal collective bargaining agreements.

stated he wanted supervisors who will carry out discipline, but did not enjoy giving discipline. He acknowledged that the current [redacted] did need to work on improving his interpersonal skills and that he verbally counseled the [redacted] on several occasions regarding those skills. He told us he did not document the verbal counseling discussions with the [redacted] because he was not disciplining the manager, and there was no reason to issue discipline.

In addition, he told us that a [redacted] made some mistakes when managing employees. He admitted that the [redacted] was abusive towards employees. He stated that he did not have any problems with this manager's behavior until his abuse towards employees became too pervasive. He then verbally counseled the manager. He told us that this session was not documented.

The [redacted] told us that he believed the Tuscaloosa Post Office is a safe working environment, and the potential for violence did not exist. At the time of the [redacted] statement, no workplace climate assessment had been conducted.[9]

[redacted] Response to Allegations

The [redacted] told us that he had a "Turbo D personality" which he described as "dominant and direct." He stated that he was aware of the Postal Service zero tolerance policy. He denied ever screaming and yelling at employees. He told us that the employees probably perceived him as harassing and intimidating because of his "dominant and direct" management style. He stated that although he has taken interpersonal skills training, it might be appropriate to enroll in additional courses to improve interaction with employees.

The [redacted] told us that, based on the information the OIG provided him about how employees felt about his management style, he believed a workplace climate assessment was necessary and would request one through the postmaster.

---

[9] The district's employee and workplace intervention analyst conducted a workplace climate assessment on July 20-22 and August 10 and 17, 1999, after our discussion with the postmaster. See discussion of this assessment below.

Workplace Climate Assessment

In June 1999 the Alabama District manager told us that the Tuscaloosa postmaster requested a workplace climate assessment, which was conducted by the district's employee and workplace intervention analyst on July 20–22, and August 10 and 17, 1999. The assessment results consisted of a memorandum written to the acting manager of Human Resources, summarizing the intervention analyst's findings. It also included 71 employee interviews. The intervention analyst identified the following six principal areas of concerns cited by the employees:

- Lack of basic training for all 204-B supervisors.[10]
- Need for interpersonal skills training for all management.
- Need for training in diversity issues.
- Perception that employees were not appreciated.
- Lack of confidentiality when talking with management.
- Perceptions by employees that management gave preferential treatment to certain employees.

The memorandum also stated that the postmaster believed the employees' bad feelings were fueled by misleading information from the unions. We found no evidence to support this statement. Our analysis of the intervention analyst's interviews showed that 54 of the 71 employees said that the [redacted] and the [redacted] harassed and intimidated them.

[10] A 204-B supervisor is a bargaining unit employee serving a temporary assignment as a supervisor.

Increased Risk for Violence

The evidence suggests that there is an increased risk for violence in the Tuscaloosa Post Office. The Threat Assessment Team Guide states that the Postal Service zero tolerance policy prohibits any incident of verbal or physical action on the part of any employee that could cause injury to another, and that the zero tolerance policy will not be ignored. Employees provided us with several examples demonstrating that certain managers did not follow the zero tolerance policy.

Seven of the thirty-six employees we interviewed expressed unsolicited opinions regarding their fears of the potential for violence in their workplace. These fears were based on their perceptions of the abusive management style practiced in the Tuscaloosa Post Office. Examples included:

- An employee described the Tuscaloosa Post Office as a "ticking time bomb" because employees are tired of being subjected to harassment and intimidation, threats, and unjustified discipline and work changes by their supervisors.

- Employees expressed frustration that the Postal Service did not address the perceived behavior problems of managers and supervisors.

- An employee reported that the [redacted] "went on a screaming tirade" and slammed an office door so violently that "the windows in the office rattled."

- Another employee told us that the [redacted] "blew up over something extremely insignificant . . . His face turned beet-red, and he started cussing very loud to an employee."

- An employee told us the [redacted] "seemed to be under a lot of stress based on the way he looked." This employee also said that the manager "seemed to be out of control."

- Another employee told us he overheard the [redacted] describe a [redacted]

[redacted] The [redacted] then stated, "[redacted]"

- Several employees said that they were afraid of the [redacted] and feared that he was potentially violent.

On May 24, 1999, three days after we concluded our interviews, an employee reported to us that the [redacted] said, in reference to a high-ranking union official, "[redacted]." In the same conversation, this manager also stated, "[redacted]"

On May 26, 1999, we reported this incident to the acting manager of Human Resources, who also served as the coordinator of the Threat Assessment Team. We asked the acting manager to review the allegations against the manager and inform us what actions the Threat Assessment Team would take to determine if the [redacted] was a threat to himself or employees.

On May 28, 1999, two days after we reported the incident, the acting manager of Human Resources asked the [redacted] respond to the allegations. In a written statement provided to us, the [redacted] denied making the comments about the union official. On June 15, 1999, the [redacted] again denied making the comment about the union official in a formal interview with us.

On June 2, 1999, we obtained statements from additional employees who confirmed that they heard the [redacted] make the statements regarding the union official. Their descriptions of the incident differed significantly from the statement we obtained from the [redacted] Specifically, in his written statement the [redacted] wrote that he joined in a conversation that was taking place among several employees in a break room. He said that the conversation was about union representation and also about how the President was often in danger when he traveled. The witnesses, however, told us that the

[redacted] comment took place in a business office and that he was speaking to no one in particular. The witnesses said they heard no discussion about the President.

In July 1999 the acting manager of Human Resources told us that the manager of Post Office Operations was preparing an [redacted] In September 1999 the acting manager of Human Resources provided us documentation that the [redacted]

District's Response to Findings of a Hostile Working Environment

On November 1, 1999, we met with the district manager and several of her staff. We outlined our findings and recommendations, and were provided with information concerning what district leadership planned to do in response. These actions were as follows:

- Beginning in November 1999 the Alabama District initiated mandatory diversity training that will eventually include all craft employees, supervisors, and managers in the district.

- The employee and workplace intervention analyst is establishing a task force consisting of craft employees and supervisors in the Tuscaloosa Post Office to provide a venue for employees to address their issues and concerns with management before serious problems occur.

- The intervention analyst will conduct a workplace climate assessment in May 2000 to determine whether craft employees believe the workplace environment at the Tuscaloosa Post Office has improved.

- The acting manager of Post Office Operations is creating a template for use when developing performance improvement plans for managers in the Alabama District.

- The acting manager of Post Office Operations will [redacted] District management will [redacted] District management then will [redacted]

- [redacted]

- [redacted]

- [redacted]

We believe that these actions appropriately address several of our findings and recommendations. We will continue to monitor events in the Tuscaloosa Post Office and have requested a copy of the workplace climate assessment scheduled for May 2000.

Recommendation

We offer the following recommendations. The vice president, Southeast Area, should:

1. Review the allegations in this report and take corrective and/or disciplinary action as appropriate.

Management's Comments

Management did not agree that disciplinary action was warranted at the area because disciplinary action is appropriately initiated by the immediate supervisor or manager. Further, local management determined that disciplinary action was not a viable option after applying appropriate standards and factors to the specific circumstances outlined in the report. However, management agreed that corrective action was appropriate and identified the specific actions to be taken in each recommendation. District management initiated detailed corrective action at the local level for the managers

	identified in the report, including formal Performance Improvement Plans and appropriate counseling. In addition, the area issued guidance to district managers to prevent similar incidents at other facilities. (See Appendix B.)
Recommendation	2. Request that the Tuscaloosa Post Office be placed on the Troubled Work Site List as a systemic site.
Management's Comments	Management agreed and stated that the Tuscaloosa Post Office is currently on the Troubled Worksite List as a systemic problem site.
Recommendation	3. Monitor the Tuscaloosa Post Office and ensure that corrective actions are taken to alleviate the conditions described in this report.
Management's Comments	Management agreed and stated that the area and district will monitor the Tuscaloosa Post Office each quarter to assure appropriate corrective actions continue to improve the workplace climate at the Tuscaloosa Post Office.
Recommendation	4. Request a review of Skyland office by the Threat Assessment Team to assess the risk of violence in the workplace.
Management's Comments	Management agreed and stated that the District Threat Assessment Team will conduct a review of the Skyland office to assess the risk of violence within the next 60 days.
Recommendation	5. Reiterate to all district and facility managers that written documentation be prepared of all counseling sessions with all supervisors and managers regarding behavior and the need for improved interpersonal skills.
Management's Comments	Management agreed and issued a memorandum dated March 6, 2000, to district managers to reinforce the basic principles of discussions and counselings and the appropriate use of supervisory notes to document informal discussions. (See Appendix B.)

Recommendation	6. Issue formal guidance that requires district and facility managers to: • Follow postal regulations and collective bargaining agreements regarding the issuance of discipline. • Adequately support, with documentation, any discipline taken in order to minimize monetary awards and settlements paid to employees due to grievances overturned in arbitration and other appellate forums.
Management's Comments	Management agreed and issued a memorandum dated March 6, 2000, to district managers to reinforce the basic principles regarding the issuance of appropriate disciplinary action and the need for adequate support on all disciplinary actions. (See Appendix B.)
Evaluation of Management's Comments	Management's comments are responsive to our recommendations and their actions taken and planned should correct the conditions identified in this report.

District Knowledge of Labor-Management Problems at the Tuscaloosa Post Office

Alabama District officials had knowledge of employee allegations of management misconduct for three years, but did not take action to resolve them. Requests for inquiries into the employees' allegations were made by Congressman Hilliard in December 1996, and the Postal Service Office of Government Relations in February 1998. District officials did not adequately respond to these allegations. For example:

- On December 19, 1996, the Inspection Service met with the manager of Post Office Operations and discussed the allegations with the Tuscaloosa postmaster. As a result of that discussion, in January 1997, the Inspection Service advised the congressman by letter that either the postmaster or the district labor relations manager would prepare a response to him.

- In April 1997 the chief postal inspector acknowledged by letter to Congressman Hilliard that the Alabama District did not respond to the congressman's requests for an inquiry as promised to the Inspection Service. The chief postal inspector advised the congressman that the manager of Post Office Operations had advised the Inspection Service that he would discuss the employees' allegations with the Tuscaloosa postmaster, and either the postmaster or the senior labor relations specialist would prepare a response to the congressman.

- In January 1998 Congressman Hilliard contacted the Government Relations representative at Postal Service Headquarters and requested a review of management practices in Tuscaloosa. The 1997 letter signed by 98 employees prompted his request.

- In February 1998 the Postal Service Government Relations representative responded to Congressman Hilliard that the manager of Post Office Operations, Alabama District, with responsibility for the

Tuscaloosa Post Office, was requested to examine the concerns of the 98 employees. The representative did not specify when the Postal Service would provide a response to the congressman.

- In March 1998 the manager of Human Resources, Alabama District, identified the Tuscaloosa Post Office as a "potential problem site," based on continuous complaints made by three employees.

- In April 1998 the Alabama District informed the Southeast Area manager of Human Resources that problems reported by the three Tuscaloosa employees were unfounded.

- In September 1998 the Alabama District informed the Southeast Area office that the Tuscaloosa Post Office was changed from a potential problem site to an individual problem site because only one of the three Tuscaloosa employees who had filed "continuous complaints" was still at that facility. This employee was identified as a "problem employee."

We questioned the decisions of postal management not to conduct a workplace climate assessment at the Tuscaloosa Post Office. Almost one-half of the employees there (98 of about 217) complained about management's abuse of employees. We interviewed district management officials on May 17, 1999,[11] to determine what was done to address the congressional inquiries and the employees' allegations. The acting manager of Human Resources said that the district requested that the Tuscaloosa Post Office be removed from the Troubled Work Site list in April 1999. The manager of Post Office Operations told us that the situation at the Tuscaloosa Post Office was fine and that the allegations were the result of a letter writing campaign by a "few" employees.

The senior labor relations specialist and the employee and workplace intervention analyst indicated that they were not

[11] Specifically, we spoke to the acting manager of Human Resources, the manager of Post Office Operations, the senior labor relations specialist, and the employee and workplace intervention analyst.

aware of any problems that would justify a workplace climate assessment in the Tuscaloosa Post Office.

Specifically, the senior labor relations specialist told us that he was not aware of any specific issues occurring there. The intervention analyst said that a workplace climate assessment was not conducted at the Tuscaloosa Post Office because the climate indicators, such as grievances and Equal Employment Opportunity complaints, did not indicate that one was needed. She added that the postmaster did not request one for the Tuscaloosa Post Office.

The allegations made by employees were not adequately addressed because the Alabama District did not conduct a workplace climate assessment in the Tuscaloosa Post Office. This inaction on the part of district managers prompted the OIG to conduct this audit. The district could have avoided many of the issues in this report by using the tools available to them, such as the Threat Assessment Team guidelines, to address the employees' concerns and take corrective action.

District's Response to Findings of Knowledge of Labor-Management Problems at the Tuscaloosa Post Office	On November 1, 1999, the district manager told us that she first learned of the letter signed by the 98 Tuscaloosa Post Office employees when we brought the matter to her attention in June 1999. She also said that her acting manager of Human Resources searched district files and could not locate any other documentation showing district knowledge of numerous complaints by Tuscaloosa employees over several years. We recognize that neither the district manager nor the acting manager of Human Resources was in their current positions when the letter signed by 98 employees was received. However, the manager of Post Office Operations, had knowledge of (1) employees' complaints against Tuscaloosa Post Office management, and (2) the congressional requests for inquiries into the allegations against Tuscaloosa Post Office managers.
Recommendation	We recommend that the vice president, Southeast Area: 7. Issue guidance to district managers requiring prompt referral of information related to threats of violence or potential violence to the Threat Assessment Team or the Inspection Service.
Management's Comments	Management agreed and the Southeast Area has mandated eight hours of workplace violence training to all supervisors/managers in FY 2000 that will reinforce the need to promptly refer all potential violence situations to the Threat Assessment Team or the Inspection Service.
Recommendation	8. Follow-up on potential violence reported to district managers to ensure that incidents are adequately reviewed and resolved.
Management's Comments	Management agreed and stated district managers would be advised of the importance of appropriate and timely follow-up to assure that all reported incidents of potential violence are adequately addressed and resolved.
Evaluation of Management's Comments	Management's comments are responsive to our recommendations and their actions taken and planned should correct the conditions identified in this report.

APPENDIX A. MANAGEMENT'S COMMENTS

Bob Davis
Vice President, Area Operations
Southeast Area

UNITED STATES
POSTAL SERVICE

March 6, 2000

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. Billy Sauls
Assistant Inspector General for Employee
Office of the Inspector General
1735 N. Lynn Street
Arlington, VA 22209-2020

SUBJECT: Draft Audit Report-Allegations of a Hostile Working Environment at a Post Office in the Southeast Area (Report Number LM-AR-00-DRAFT)

This is a response to the Draft Audit Report regarding the allegations of a hostile working environment at a Post Office in the Southeast Area (Tuscaloosa, AL) dated February 7, 2000.

The summary recommended that the results be reviewed with appropriate corrective/ disciplinary actions and specific guidance to the field to prevent similar problems in other postal facilities. Prior to responding to the specific numeric recommendations, some general comments are necessary. It appears that current District management has taken immediate corrective action to address the concerns outlined in the audit. This is evidenced by the references to the past tense in determining whether a hostile work environment was currently in existence (i.e., "a hostile work environment *existed* at the Tuscaloosa Post Office"). In addition, initial indicators reveal that the corrective action initiated is resulting in improvement as EEO formal complaints have been reduced by 75% to SPLY (16 to 4) in the Tuscaloosa Office.

Regarding the recommendation that the Area Vice President should take corrective and/or disciplinary action as appropriate, no disciplinary action is appropriate at the Area level. As discussed in the audit briefing on December 22, 1999, disciplinary action is appropriately initiated by the immediate supervisor/manager. In this instance, disciplinary action would only be initiated at the Area level if the District Manager's actions warranted such. Clearly, no disciplinary action is warranted for the current District Manager as a result of the audit results. Disciplinary action regarding subordinate local management is appropriately initiated at the local level by the immediate manager. However, upon local management review, disciplinary action was not determined to be a viable option after applying the just cause standards and Douglas factors to the specific circumstances outlined in the report. District management has, however, initiated detailed corrective action at the local level and appropriately counseled (with written documentation) the relevant managers/ supervisors. The

255 N Humphreys Blvd
Memphis TN 38166-0100
901-747-7333
Fax: 901-747-7491

following is a specific response to the numeric audit recommendations and reflect general agreement with the recommendations:

1. The audit report has been reviewed and appropriate corrective action has been initiated at both the Area and District levels. Guidance will be issued from the Area level in an effort to prevent similar incidents at other facilities. The District has established a formal Performance Improvement Plan for both the Postmaster and the Skyland manager and has counseled the relevant managers regarding the need to timely and appropriately address any reported incidents of workplace violence.
2. The Tuscaloosa Post Office is currently on the Troubled Worksite List as a systemic problem site.
3. The Area and District will monitor the Tuscaloosa Post Office on a quarterly basis to assure appropriate corrective actions continue to improve the workplace climate at the Tuscaloosa Post Office.
4. The District Threat Assessment Team will conduct a review of the Skyland office to assess the risk of violence within the next 60 days.
5. A memorandum will be issued to District Managers to reinforce the basic principles of discussions/counselings and the appropriate use of supervisory notes to document informal discussions. *[Attachment 1 dated March 6, 2000]*
6. A memorandum will be issued to District Managers to reinforce the basic principles regarding the issuance of appropriate disciplinary action and the need for adequate support on all disciplinary actions. *[Attachment 1 dated March 6, 2000]*
7. The Southeast Area has mandated 8 hours of workplace violence training to all supervisors/managers in FY 2000 that will reinforce the need to promptly refer all potential violence situations to TAT or the Inspection Service.
8. District Managers will be advised of the importance of appropriate and timely follow-up to assure that all reported incidents of potential violence are adequately addressed and resolved.

Regarding the FOIA concerns, references to disciplinary and/or corrective action recommendations regarding specific managers should be exempted from public disclosure due to Privacy Act considerations. If you require any additional information, please contact Karen Borowski, Manager, Human Resources, at 901-747-7200.

Bob Davis

cc: Gloria Tyson
Anthony Vegliante
Yvonne Maguire

APPENDIX B. GUIDANCE TO DISTRICT MANAGERS

HUMAN RESOURCES

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

March 6, 2000

MEMORANDUM FOR: DISTRICT MANAGERS

SUBJECT: Discussions and Disciplinary Actions

As a result of a recent OIG audit of a post office in the Southeast Area, several items regarding predisciplinary and disciplinary actions were noted. In an effort to reinforce some basic principles regarding discussions and disciplinary actions, the following guidance is offered.

Discussions
Discussions and informal counseling sessions regarding perceived work, conduct or behavior deficiencies are to be held in private between the supervisor and employee. These discussions/counselings are not considered discipline and are not grievable. However, such discussions may be relied upon to establish that employees have been made aware of their deficiencies as well as their obligations and responsibilities. Following such discussions, it would be prudent for the supervisor to make a personal notation of the date and subject matter of such discussions for his/her own personal records. No notation or other information pertaining to such discussion shall be included in an employee's personnel folder. However, such notations are to be maintained in accordance with Section 314.5 of the Employee & Labor Relations Manual (ELM) entitled, *"Supervisor's Personnel Records and Personal Notes."*

Disciplinary Actions
Management bears the burden of proof in disciplinary actions. This is an important requirement that must not be taken lightly. Managers/supervisors must adequately support, with documentation, any discipline taken in order to minimize monetary awards and settlements paid to employees as a result of being overturned in the administrative appeal forums. The applicable procedures for issuing discipline are found in Article 16 of the National Agreement for bargaining unit employees and ELM 650 for nonbargaining employees; managers/supervisors are required to follow these procedures accordingly. In addition, Labor Relations should be consulted for assistance, as necessary, in the preparation of disciplinary actions.

Please distribute the above guidance to the appropriate district and facility managers.

Karen A. Borowski
Manager, Human Resources

cc: Managers, Human Resources (Districts)

225 N Humphreys Boulevard
Memphis TN 38166-0640
901-747-7200
Fax 901-747-7491

Major Contributors to This Report:

[redacted]