Brookland Station in Washington, DC: Delivery Operations

AUDIT REPORT

Report Number 24-065-1-R24 | April 11, 2024

Transmittal Letter

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

April 11, 2024

MEMORANDUM FOR: LORA M. MCLUCAS
MANAGER, MARYLAND DISTRICT

FROM: Joseph E. Wolski
Director, Field Operations, Atlantic & WestPac

SUBJECT: Audit Report – Brookland Station in Washington, DC: Delivery Operations (Project Number 24-065-1-R24)

This report presents the results of our audit of mail delivery operations and property conditions at the Brookland Station in Washington, DC.

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies provided by your staff. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Monica Brym, Audit Manager, or me at 703-248-2100.

Attachment

cc: Postmaster General
Chief Retail & Delivery Officer & Executive Vice President
Vice President, Delivery Operations
Vice President, Retail & Post Office Operations
Vice President, Atlantic Area Retail & Delivery Operations
Director, Retail & Post Office Operations Maintenance
Corporate Audit and Response Management

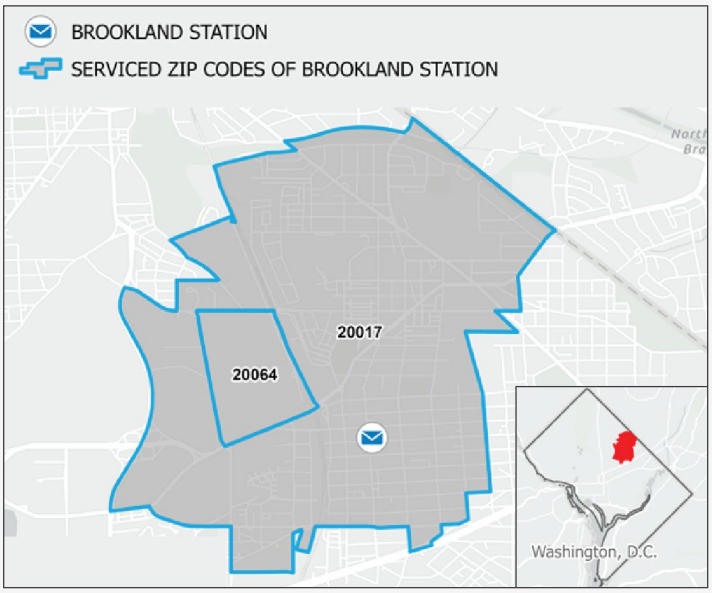
Results

Background

The U.S. Postal Service's mission is to provide timely, reliable, secure, and affordable mail and package delivery to more than 160 million residential and business addresses across the country. The U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) reviews delivery operations at facilities across the country and provides management with timely feedback in furtherance of this mission.

This interim report presents the results of our self-initiated audit of delivery operations and property conditions at the Brookland Station in Washington, DC (Project Number 24-065-1). The Brookland Station is in the Maryland District of the Atlantic Area and services ZIP Codes 20017 and 20064 (see Figure 1). These ZIP Codes serve 21,062 people in an urban area.[1]

Figure 1. ZIP Codes Serviced by the Brookland Station



Source: U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General.

This delivery unit has 18 city routes. The Brookland Station is one of three delivery units[2] the OIG reviewed during the week of February 5, 2024, that are serviced by the Curseen-Morris Processing and Distribution Center (P&DC).

We assessed all units serviced by the Curseen-Morris P&DC based on the number of Customer 360[3] (C360) delivery-related inquiries,[4] Informed Delivery[5] contacts, stop-the-clock[6] (STC) scans performed away from the delivery point, and undelivered route information between October 1 and December 31, 2023. We also reviewed first and last mile failures[7] during the same time period.

We judgmentally selected the Brookland Station primarily based on the number of C360 inquiries related to delivery and STC scans performed at the unit and away from the delivery point. The unit was also chosen based on first and last mile failures. See Table 1 for a comparison of some of these metrics between the unit and the rest of the district.

Table 1. Delivery Metric Comparison Between October 1 and December 31, 2023

Delivery Metric	Unit Average per Route	District Average per Route
C360 Delivery Inquiries	6.9	6.1
Scans Performed at the Unit	9.0	7.9
Scans Performed Away from Delivery Point	9.4	6.9

Source: U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) analysis of Postal Service's C360, Informed Delivery, Facility Database, and Product Tracking and Reporting (PTR) System data extracted on January 4, 2024. PTR is the system of record for all delivery status information for mail and packages with trackable services and barcodes.

1 We obtained ZIP Code information related to population and urban/rural classification from 2020 Census Bureau information.
2 The other two units were the Lammond Riggs Station in Washington, DC (Project Number 24-065-2) and the Ward Place Carrier Annex in Washington, DC (Project Number 24-065-3).
3 A cloud-based application that enables Postal Service employees to diagnose, resolve, and track customer inquiries.
4 A compilation of package inquiry, package pickup, daily mail service, and hold mail inquiries.
5 Informed Delivery is a free and optional notification service that gives residential customers the ability to digitally preview their letter-sized mail and submit inquiries for mailpieces that were expected for delivery but have not arrived.
6 A scan event that indicates the Postal Service has completed its commitment to deliver or attempt to deliver the mailpiece. Examples of STC scans include "Delivered," "Available for Pickup," and "No Access."
7 First mile failures occur when a mailpiece is collected and does not receive a processing scan at the P&DC on the day that it was intended. Last mile failures occur after the mailpiece has been processed at the P&DC on a final processing operation and is not delivered to the customer on the day it was intended.

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

Our objective was to evaluate mail delivery operations and property conditions at the Brookland Station in Washington, DC.

To accomplish our objective, we focused on five audit areas: delayed mail, package scanning, arrow keys,[8] carrier complement and timekeeping, and property conditions. Specifically, we reviewed delivery metrics including the number of routes and carriers, mail arrival time, amount of reported delayed mail, package scanning, carrier complement and timekeeping, and distribution up-time.[9] During our site visit we observed mail conditions; package scanning procedures; arrow key security procedures; timekeeping documentation; and unit safety, security, and maintenance conditions. We also analyzed the scan status of mailpieces at the carrier cases and in the "Notice Left" area[10] and interviewed unit management and employees. We discussed our observations and conclusions, as summarized, in Table 2 with management on March 21, 2024, and included their comments, where appropriate.

We are issuing this interim report to provide the Postal Service with timely information regarding conditions we identified at the Brookland Station. We will issue a separate report[11] that provides the Postal Service with the overall findings and recommendations for all three delivery units. See Appendix A for additional information about our scope and methodology.

Results Summary

We identified issues affecting delivery operations and property conditions at the Brookland Station. Specifically, we found issues with four of the five areas we reviewed (See Table 2).

Table 2. Summary of Results

Audit Area	Deficiencies Identified	
	Yes	No
Delayed Mail	X	
Package Scanning	X	
Arrow Keys		X
Carrier Complement and Timekeeping	X	
Property Conditions	X	

Source: Results of our fieldwork during the week of February 5, 2024.

We did not identify any issues with arrow keys and carrier complement. However, we did identify issues with timekeeping management (see Finding #3).

8 A distinctively shaped key carriers use to open mail-receiving receptacles such as street collection boxes and panels of apartment house mailboxes equipped with an arrow lock. Arrow keys are accountable property and are subject to strict controls.
9 Time of day that clerks have completed distributing mail to the carrier routes.
10 The area of a delivery unit where letters or packages that the carriers were unable to deliver are stored for customer pickup.
11 Project Number 24-065.

Finding #1: Delayed Mail

What We Found

On the morning of February 6, 2024, we identified 1,255 delayed mailpieces at 12 carrier cases. Specifically, we identified 1,149 letters, 90 flats, and 16 packages. In addition, management did not report this mail as undelivered in the Delivery Condition Visualization (DCV)[12] system. See Figure 2 for examples of delayed mail found at carrier cases. In addition, the carriers did not complete Postal Service (PS) Forms 1571, Undelivered Mail Report,[13] to document undelivered mailpieces.

Figure 2. Example of Delayed Mail in a Carrier Case

Source: OIG photo taken February 6, 2024.

Why Did It Occur

Management did not provide adequate oversight to verify that all mail was cleared from the unit and any delayed mail was accurately reported in the DCV system. Specifically, management did not perform a thorough walkthrough the previous evening to identify delayed mail. In addition, management did not ensure that carriers completed PS Forms 1571 and note the reason why mail could not be delivered. Management said that most of the delayed mail identified was returned mail from split routes. He said the carriers from the day before were unfamiliar with these routes, and the regular carriers on those routes were supposed to review the mail to determine whether it could be delivered or returned but had not done so.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have made sure that all mail was processed and delivered on the day it was committed for delivery and reported delayed mail in DCV. Postal Service policy[14] states that all types of First-Class Mail, Priority Mail, and Priority Express Mail are always committed for delivery on the day of receipt. Management should have instructed and monitored that carriers complete PS Form 1571, to alert unit management of mail that was not delivered by the carriers.[15] In addition, managers are required[16] to report all mail in the delivery unit after the carriers have left for their street duties as either delayed or curtailed in DCV. Further, management must update DCV if volumes have changed prior to the end of the business day.

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

When mail is delayed, there is an increased risk of customer dissatisfaction, which may adversely affect the Postal Service brand. In addition, inaccurate reporting of delayed mail in DCV provides management at the local, district, area, and headquarters levels with an inaccurate status of mail delays and can result in improper actions taken to address issues.

12 A tool for unit management to manually self-report delayed mail, which provides a snapshot of daily mail conditions at the point in time when carriers have departed for the street.
13 PS Form 1571, *Undelivered Mail Report*, lists all mail distributed to the carrier for delivery that was left in the office or returned undelivered.
14 *Committed Mail & Color Code Policy for Marketing Mail* stand-up talk, February 2019.
15 Handbook M-41, City *Delivery Carriers Duties and Responsibilities*, paragraph 44.442.2.
16 *Informed Visibility Delivery Condition Visualization User Guide*, August 2023.

Finding #2: Package Scanning

What We Found

Employees scanned packages improperly at the delivery unit, scanned packages away from the intended delivery point, and handled packages incorrectly at the unit.

We reviewed package scanning data for scans that occurred at the unit and removed any potentially accurate scans performed.[17] In total, employees improperly scanned 162 packages at the delivery unit between October and December 2023 (see Table 3). Further analysis of the STC scan data for these packages showed that 97.5 percent of them were scanned "Delivered."

Table 3. STC Scans at Delivery Unit

STC Scan Type	Count	Percentage
Delivered	158	97.5%
Delivery Attempted – No Access	3	1.9%
No Secure Location Available	1	0.6%
Total	**162**	**100%**

Source: OIG analysis of the Postal Service's Product Tracking and Reporting (PTR) System data. PTR is the system of record for all delivery status information for mail and packages with trackable services and barcodes.

We also reviewed 166 scans occurring away from the delivery unit and over 1,000 feet[18] from the intended delivery point between October and December 2023 (see Table 4). We removed scans that could have been performed within policy, such as animal interference and unsafe conditions. Further analysis of the STC scan data for these packages showed that 96.4 percent of them were scanned "Delivered."

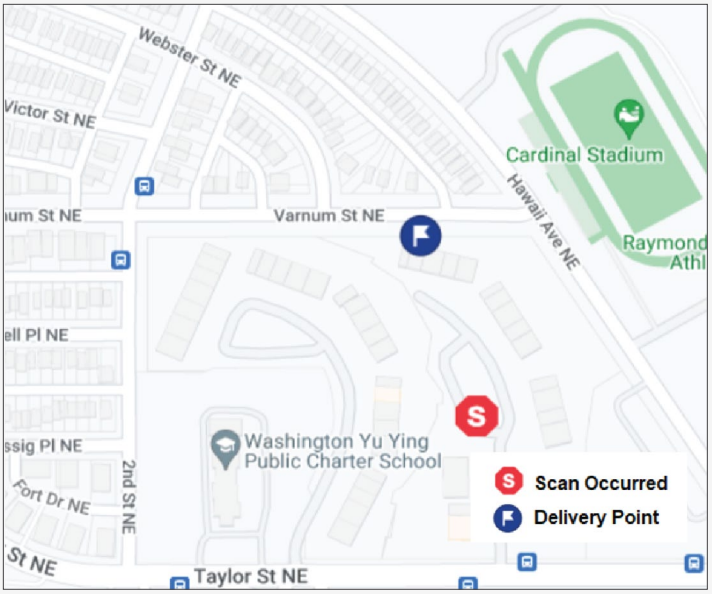
Table 4. STC Scans Over 1,000 Feet Away From the Delivery Point

STC Scan Type	Count	Percentage
Delivered	160	96.4%
Return to Sender	5	3.0%
Unable to Forward/ Forward Order Expired	1	0.6%
Total	**166**	**100%**

Source: OIG analysis of the Postal Service's PTR System data.

For example, the map below (see Figure 3) shows an instance where a carrier scanned a package as delivered .2 miles away from the delivery point.

Figure 3. Scan Away From the Delivery Point in Washington, DC



Source: Postal Service Single Package Look Up.

We also found issues with scanning and handling of packages in the unit. On the morning of February 6, 2024, before carriers arrived for the day, we selected 31 packages[19] to review and analyze scanning and tracking history. Of the 31 sampled

17 This data does not include scans that could properly be made at a delivery unit, such as "Delivered – PO Box" and "Customer (Vacation) Hold." Additionally, PO Box scans at the unit were only counted when the delivery point was an address away from the unit. This category does not include mail addressed for a PO Box.
18 Packages are expected to be scanned within a designated buffer distance from the delivery point. The OIG evaluates any package that was scanned more than 1,000 feet from the delivery point.
19 We selected all packages from the carrier cases (16) and from the "Notice Left" area (15).

packages, 14 (45 percent) had improper scans or handling, including:

- 11 packages (10 from the carrier cases and one from the "Notice Left" area) were scanned delivered, which should only be performed when a package is successfully left at the customer's delivery address.
- Two packages at the carrier cases were scanned "delivery attempted-no access" and should have been returned to sender. One package had vacant written on it and the other noted no such number (NSN), and should have been returned to sender.
- One package at the carrier case was scanned insufficient address on January 22, 2024, and should have been returned to sender.

Further, one package in the "Notice Left" area was not returned to sender, as required. This package was 30 days past the scheduled return date and was an intercepted package.[20] The customer never picked up the item.

Why Did It Occur

These scanning issues occurred because unit management did not adequately monitor and enforce proper package scanning and handling procedures and, therefore, was not aware of the issues. Unit management also stated that some carriers may not be fully trained on package handling and scanning procedures. In addition, management explained that the scanning issues may have occurred because one carrier, with the highest improper STC scans, had a route that was close to the unit.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have monitored scan performance daily and enforced compliance. The Postal Service's goal is to ensure proper delivery attempts for mailpieces to the correct address with proper service,[21] which includes scanning packages at the time and location of delivery.[22] Packages on the "Notice Left" area should have been reviewed for second notices and returned to sender if they remained after the prescribed number of days.[23]

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

Customers rely on accurate scan data to track their packages in real time. When employees do not scan mailpieces correctly, customers are unable to determine the actual status of their packages. By improving scanning operations, management can improve mail visibility, increase customer satisfaction, and enhance both the customer experience and the Postal Service brand.

20 A fee-based service that intercepts mail at the initial destination delivery unit and redirected to another delivery unit.
21 *Delivery Done Right the First Time* stand-up talk, March 2020.
22 *Carriers Delivering the Customer Experience* stand-up talk, July 2017.
23 *Notice Left and Return Guidelines*, April 2016. Domestic packages should be returned to sender on the 15th calendar day after a notice is left, and international packages should be returned to sender on the 30th calendar day after a notice is left.

Finding # 3: Timekeeping Management

What We Found

We determined that between October 1 through December 29, 2023, the unit did not complete, print, and retain PS Form 2240, *Pay, Leave, or Other Hours Adjustment Request* for the one pay adjustment during this period.

We also determined that the unit had seven disallowed time occurrences and 10 instances of unauthorized overtime for the same period. Management did not resolve six of the seven disallowed time occurrences and six of 10 instances of unauthorized overtime in the Time and Attendance Collection System (TACS).[24] Management had a binder for the PS Forms 1017-A, *Time Disallowance Record*,[25] and the PS Forms 1017-B, *Unauthorized Overtime Record*.[26] However, the binder did not contain documentation of any occurrences since 2022 and was unsecured on a supervisor's desk.

Why Did It Occur

Management did not oversee that the pay adjustment and occurrences of disallowed time and unauthorized overtime were completed due to competing priorities. In addition, management was unaware of the requirement to retain copies of pay adjustment, disallowed time, and unauthorized overtime records. Regarding the pay adjustment, management said they sent the records to Postal Labor Relations and did not maintain a copy for its files. Regarding disallowed time and unauthorized overtime entries, management was unaware of the requirement to maintain the documents in the binder because it believed the records in TACS were sufficient.

What Should Have Happened

Postal Service policy[27] states that pay adjustment certifications are to be kept on file and attached to supporting documentation for the current calendar year plus the three previous years. Policy[28] further states unit personnel must complete PS Form 1017-A and PS Form 1017-B entries and place them in a notebook binder — secured from unauthorized access — documenting the reason for the disallowed time or unauthorized overtime. Postal guidance[29] provides instructions on how to complete the entries in TACS.

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

When proper documentation of pay adjustments, time disallowance, and unauthorized overtime is not completed, management could incur additional managerial workhours. In addition, the Postal Service risks violation of the Fair Labor Standards Act[30] when unit management does not maintain documentation that shows the justifiable reason and employee notification for disallowed time.

Management Actions

During our visit, management removed the binder intended to maintain PS Forms 1017-A and 1017-B from the workroom floor and secured it in the manager's office.

24 The system used by Postal Service to automate the collection of employee time and attendance information.
25 Form used only when a supervisor observes, or has reason to know, that an employee did not work, while "on the clock." The supervisor must document the basis for any such disallowance. These forms serve as a cumulative record of disallowed time.
26 Managers and supervisors are required to complete a PS Form 1017-B the first time a non-exempt employee incurs unauthorized overtime. These forms serve as a cumulative record of unauthorized overtime.
27 *AdjustPay User Guide*, Course No. 31202-25, updated February 9, 2017.
28 Handbook F-21, *Time and Attendance*, Section 146 – Approving Entries, February 2016.
29 TACS Training Page, Training Video 1017-A 1017 B Enhancement Demo.
30 29 USC § 201-219.

Finding # 4: Property Conditions

What We Found

We found safety, security, and maintenance issues at the Brookland Station:

Property Safety:

- All five fire extinguishers did not have monthly inspections, as required, and one was missing in the vestibule area.
- There was a dislodged electrical socket in the customer lobby (see Figure 4).
- Several doors on the workroom floor were missing Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) required "This is Not an Exit" signs.
- There was a blocked sprinkler and hydraulic control in a storage room and may require inspection.
- There was a broken handrail at dock area (see Figure 5).
- There was an unsecured electrical cord on the workroom floor posing a trip hazard.
- There was a non-functioning handicap access button in the customer lobby.
- There was an expansion joint needing repair at the customer lobby entrance posing a trip hazard.
- There was a cord hanging from a monitor in the customer lobby.
- There was a raised sidewalk at the customer lobby entrance posing a trip hazard.
- There was an unsecured ladder in the custodial closet.

Figure 4: Dislodged Electrical Socket in Lobby

Source: OIG photo taken February 6, 2024.

Figure 5: Broken Handrail in Dock Area

Source: OIG photo taken February 6, 2024.

Property Security:

- There were no "Subject to Search" signs posted in the parking lot.
- There were no "U.S. Property No Trespassing" signs posted around the facility.

Property Maintenance:

- There was trash, excessive equipment, and overgrown foliage around the unit (see Figure 6).
- There was a tree hanging over the awning in the postal vehicle parking lot and fallen tree debris scattered on the grounds at the rear of the facility.
- There was an inoperable light over the dock platform.
- The exterior of the building at the customer parking lot needed a power wash.
- There were missing, broken, misaligned, and stained ceiling tiles throughout the facility and dock area (see Figure 7).
- There were dirty blinds, cobwebs, and dust/dirt through the customer lobby area.
- There was a loose structure above the PO Box area in the customer lobby.
- The handrails at the customer lobby entrance need painting.
- The door frames and glass in the customer lobby needed cleaning.
- There were several inoperable lights on the workroom floor and over the PO Box section in the customer lobby.
- There was a leaking faucet in the men's restroom.

Figure 6: Trash and Overgrown Foliage

Source: OIG photo taken February 7, 2024.

Figure 7: Missing, Broken, Misaligned, and Stained Tiles

Source: OIG photos taken February 7, 2024

Why Did It Occur

Management did not provide sufficient oversight and take the necessary actions to verify that property condition issues were promptly identified and corrected because management was focused on other duties. The manager said he did not address the property and maintenance issues he was aware of because he prioritized duties to address customer inquiries, get the mail out for delivery each day, and get the carriers back safely each day.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have provided sufficient oversight maintaining facility conditions, reporting safety and maintenance issues as they arose, and following up on completion. The Postal Service requires management to maintain a safe environment for employees and customers.[31]

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

Management's attention to maintenance, safety, and security deficiencies can reduce the risk of injuries to employees and customers; reduce related costs, such as workers' compensation claims, lawsuits, and penalties; and enhance the customer experience and Postal Service brand.

Management's Comments

Management agreed with all the findings in the report. See Appendix B for management's comments in their entirety.

31 Postal Service Handbook EL-801, *Supervisor's Safety Handbook*, July 2020.

Appendix A: Additional Information

We conducted this audit from January through April 2024 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards and included such tests of internal controls as we considered necessary under the circumstances. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective.

In planning and conducting the audit, we obtained an understanding of the Brookland Station delivery operations internal control structure to help determine the nature, timing, and extent of our audit procedures. We reviewed the management controls for overseeing the program and mitigating associated risks. Additionally, we assessed the internal control components and underlying principles, and we determined that the following three components were significant to our audit objective:

- Control Activities
- Information and Communication
- Monitoring

We developed audit work to ensure that we assessed these controls. Based on the work performed, we identified internal control deficiencies related to all three components that were significant within the context of our objectives. We will issue a separate report that provides the Postal Service with the overall findings and recommendations for the Brookland Station, Lammond Riggs Station, and the Ward Place Carrier Annex. These recommendations, if implemented, should correct the weaknesses we identified.

We assessed the reliability of PTR, DCV, TACS, and the electronic Facilities Management System[32] data by reviewing existing information, comparing data from other sources, observing operations, and interviewing Postal Service officials knowledgeable about the data. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

32 A custom-built Postal Service system used to manage work orders, contracts, and payments for facility construction, repairs, and alteration contracts, along with real estate contracts.

Appendix B: Management's Comments

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

March 22, 2024

JOHN CIHOTA
DIRECTOR, AUDIT SERVICES

SUBJECT: Management Response: Brookland Station, Washington, DC: Delivery Operations (Report Number 24-065-1-DRAFT)

Thank you for providing the Postal Service an opportunity to review and comment on the findings contained in the draft audit report, *Brookland Station, Washington, DC: Delivery Operations*.

Management generally agrees with the four findings in the report on delayed mail, package scanning, timekeeping, and property conditions.

Management has begun taking steps to address the four findings.

Delayed Mail: Management will conduct a service talk on proper handling and recording of delayed mail in DCV. Management will also reiterate the requirement to use PS Form 1571 *Undelivered Mail Report*. Reviews will be conducted to monitor for compliance.

Package Scanning: Management will provide a service talk on proper scanning procedures and conduct reviews to monitor compliance.

Timekeeping Management: Management will be retrained on proper record keeping for pay adjustments, disallowed time, and unauthorized overtime. Management has placed binders in a secure location and will monitor to ensure 1017-A and 1017-B forms are completed accurately.

Property Conditions: Management has begun addressing the property conditions related to safety, security, and maintenance.

E-SIGNED by Lora Mclucas
on 2024-03-21 18:39:11 EDT

Lora McLucas
District Manager, Maryland/DC District

cc: *Vice President, Area Retail & Delivery Operations (Atlantic)*
Corporate Audit Response Management

Contact us via our Hotline and FOIA forms. Follow us on social networks. Stay informed.

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