

February 24, 2000

DEBORAH K. WILLHITE,
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, GOVERNMENT RELATIONS
and PUBLIC POLICY

SUBJECT: Allegations of Abuse of Postalwatch.org Web
Link (Report Number C-MA-00-001)

This management advisory report highlights the results of a review we conducted at the request of the senior advisor to the postmaster general (Project Number 99CS007CI000). In July 1999 the senior advisor to the postmaster general reported receipt of a complaint from a representative of Postal Watch, alleging that postal employees were repeatedly visiting the Postal Watch website, causing disruption to the website.

Results in Brief

This review revealed that in at least two locations, the United States Postal Service Government Relations website has a direct link to an external, non-Postal Service website of an organization named Postal Watch. As a result of this link between the Government Relations website and Postal Watch, over 1000 visits per day were made by Postal Service employees to the Postal Watch website. We suggest that steps be taken to remove the links from the web page in question to Postal Watch. Management disagreed with the contents of the report and concluded that the report provided no evidence of "abuse or excessive usage by postal employees." We do not agree with management's decision to retain the link to Postalwatch.org and may reexamine this issue as part of a broader review of postal Internet policies.

Background

The Postal Service maintains websites on the Internet for public access, www.Postal Service.gov and www.Postal Service.com; and the Postal Service Intranet for employees, contractors and other authorized users, www.blue.Postal Service.gov. The purpose of the websites is to provide a

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readily available access point for customers and users to obtain information regarding the Postal Service and its services. These services are designed to promote products and services offered by the Postal Service and to increase Postal Service revenue.

These websites also offer a limited number of direct links to non-Postal Service websites for its users. One of these links involves Postal Watch, www.postalwatch.org (Appendix A). The Postal Watch website describes itself as ". . . the official website dedicated to monitoring and challenging the unwarranted and damaging regulatory actions of the United States Postal Service."

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

The purpose of this review was to determine whether Postal Service employees were excessively accessing the Postal Watch website via the Postal Service Intranet. To conduct the review, we interviewed employees of the Postal Service National Information Systems Support Center, Raleigh, North Carolina. We also analyzed proxy firewall logs for the period of June 30 to July 31, 1999.

This review was conducted from July 1999 through February 2000 in accordance with the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency, Quality Standards for Inspections. We discussed our conclusions and observations with appropriate management officials and included their comments, where appropriate.

Observations

This review disclosed that from June 30 to July 31, 1999, the Postal Watch website was accessed approximately 31,000 times from Postal Service.gov hosts, averaging over 1000 visits per day by postal employees. At least two Postal Service webpages, <http://blue.Postal Service.gov/grweb/main.htm> (Appendix B), and <http://blue.Postal Service.gov/grweb/> (Appendix C), operated by Postal Service Government Relations, maintained direct links to Postal Watch.¹ These links provide an easy way for postal employees to find and access the Postal Watch website. While any postal

¹ There is a multitude of other Postal Service.gov and Postal Service.com websites. Many of these websites maintain links to other Postal Service and non-Postal Service websites. The precise number of Postal Service websites with links to Postal Watch could not be determined.

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employee with postal approved Internet access could find and visit the Postal Watch website, the public display of this website on the Postal Service Government Relations web page could be viewed as an encouragement for postal employees to visit the website.

Suggestion

We suggest that the senior vice president, Government Relations and Public Policy, should remove all direct links from the Postal Service Government Relations website to the website maintained by Postal Watch.

**Management's
Comments**

Management disagreed with the contents of this report and concluded that the report provided no evidence of "abuse or excessive usage by postal employees". As such, management will take no action to remove the direct link to postalwatch.org. Management stated that without a "legal or professional restriction" policy prohibiting Postal Service employees from accessing non-Postal Service websites, the Office of Government Relations and Public Policy intends to maintain the current direct links to postalwatch.org. They believe the links improve the performance of the Postal Service and allow the Postal Service to respond constructively and appropriately to misleading information.

Management's verbatim comments are contained in Appendix D.

**Evaluation of
Management's
Comments**

We disagree that the report did not provide evidence of abuse or excessive usage by postal employees. We believe that over 1,000 accesses per day by postal employees is excessive. Further, eliminating the direct link to Postal Watch will not prevent postal employees, who so desire, from accessing the website. Additionally, Postal Watch was the only website whose purpose is to monitor and challenge the "unwarranted and damaging regulatory actions of the United States Postal Service" to which the Postal Service provided a link on its websites.

We do not agree with management's decision to retain the link to Postalwatch.org. The Postal Service operates one of the largest Intranets in the federal government. Any link of the postal Intranet to an external website increases the potential Internet traffic between the Postal Service and the external website. Therefore, we may reexamine this issue as part of a broader review of postal Internet policies.

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

//signed//

Norman B. Hancock
Assistant Inspector General
for Customer

Attachment

cc: Richard D. Weirich
Larry M. Speakes
John R. Gunnels

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APPENDIX A. www.postalwatch.org

The screenshot shows a browser window with the address bar displaying "www.postalwatch.org". The website has a black header with the "Postal Watch" logo in blue and white, featuring a dog icon. The tagline reads "The Watchdog over the US Postal Service". Below the header, there are two main calls to action: "Subscribe Today! FREE E-mail News Updates" and "Become a member and support Postal Watch".

The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column contains a navigation menu with the following items: "About Postal Watch", "Action Plan", "News & Information", "Resource Library", "Become a Member", "Free Email News", "Heroes Gallery", "Financial Support", "Useful Links", and "Contact Us".

The right column features several news items:

- Urgent Alert!** (with a downward arrow)
 - 10/20/99
SBA Office of Advocacy in letter to Postmaster General states "To implement and enforce such a regulation is not only bad public policy, it may also violate the law."
 - 10/19/99
Congress Holds Hearings on CMRA Regulations, PostalWatch Testifies
 - 09/23/99
House Majority Leader Dick Armey's Letter to Postmaster General Henderson
- The Pen is mightier than the Sword!** (with a downward arrow)
 - RELEVANT INFO**
 - 10/29/99 Many House Members Criticize Post Office Move to Regulate Private Mail Boxes
 - 10/20/99 E-mail use may force

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APPENDIX B. <http://blue.usps.gov/grweb/main.htm>



Welcome to Government Relations' Intranet Site

Updated October 15, 1999

[S. 556 & H.R. 670 Update](#)

The impact of S. 556 and H.R. 670 on the Postal Service, citizens, and local communities.

[CMRA Update](#)

"THE FACTS" about the U.S. Postal Service's New CMRA Regulations.

CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE

The Senate and House fall recess is scheduled for October 9 - 11; the targeted adjournment for the first session of the 106th Congress is October 29.

[Cosponsor Update](#)

New cosponsor of H.J. Res. 55

[Outreach update through October 14th.](#)

Info on GR coordination of Postal Service activities, events and issues involving the U.S. Congress.

[Postal Related Bills:](#)

Eight new pieces of legislation were introduced.

Ever heard of [Postal Watch](#)?

"...the official website dedicated to monitoring and challenging the unwarranted and damaging regulatory actions of the United States Postal Service."

About Government Relations

As the Postal Service's primary liaison to government leaders and policy makers, Government Relations serves to advance, support, and defend the purpose, benefits, and challenges of binding the nation together through efficient and affordable universal mail service to everyone, everywhere, every day.

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Send Comments/Suggestions via cc:mail to GOVRELWEB.

APPENDIX C. <http://blue.usps.gov/grweb>



— Contact Us: —

Select a State

Find a Government Relations Rep.

- Government Relations Organization
- Postal-Related Legislation
- Useful Information
- Interesting Links
- Congressional Oversight Committees

Welcome to Government Relations' Intranet Site

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APPENDIX D. Management's Comments

DEBORAH K. WILLHITE
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT
GOVERNMENT RELATIONS AND PUBLIC POLICY



November 30, 1999

NORMAN B. HANCOCK
ASSISTANT INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR CUSTOMER

SUBJECT: Draft Management Advisory – Allegations of Abuse of Postalwatch.org Web Link
(Report Number CI-MA-OO-DRAFT)

This is in response to your suggestion that the Senior Vice President, Government Relations and Public Policy, remove all direct links from the Government Relations website to the website maintained by Postal Watch. I can find no legal reason for the Postal Service to discourage its employees from accessing and monitoring public information about the organization. Absent a legal or professional restriction, it is my responsibility as the Government Relations and Public Policy officer to ensure that comments about the Postal Service are disseminated to our employees. This gives us the opportunity to improve our performance in response to constructive criticism and to respond appropriately to misleading or incorrect information. Our website links provide a useful way for employees to access publicly disseminated information that has a direct bearing on their careers and current and future operations of the Postal Service. Given that the advisory does not provide any evidence of abuse or excessive usage by postal employees, I see no justification for removing the direct link from the Government Relations website.

In reaching my decision, I requested that the Law Department review this matter. I appreciate your efforts in examining this issue. If I may be of further assistance, please let me know.

Deborah K. Willhite

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**Major Contributors to
This Report:**

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