
**Hearing before the Subcommittee on Government Operations
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
United States House of Representatives**



Oral Statement

Examining the Shipment of Illicit Drugs in International Mail

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**Tammy Whitcomb
Acting Inspector General
United States Postal Service**

Good afternoon, Chairman Meadows, Ranking Member Connolly, and members of the subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me to discuss our work using data analytics to uncover drug trafficking in international mail.

The explosion of global ecommerce has led to rapid growth in inbound international mail parcels. Unfortunately, illicit drugs can hide within this traffic. There is a need for more effective ways to monitor inbound mail and find high-risk shipments. We believe data analytics can contribute to a solution.

The Postal Service has been working with international postal organizations to increase the amount of advance electronic data it receives on parcels inbound to the United States. This data includes information on the sender, addressee, and contents of the mail piece. The Postal Service and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) are currently conducting a pilot using this data, which allows CBP to target parcels more effectively for inspection. Last May, I testified before the Senate regarding the pilot and our work in this area. During that hearing, concerns were raised about the safety of postal employees who might be exposed to parcels containing dangerous opioids.

In July, our office started to examine whether we could use advance electronic data to determine the risks to postal employees from opioid parcels. Coincidentally, at the same time, we joined a narcotics trafficking investigation that appeared to involve a Postal Service employee. The case was initiated because CBP had seized a parcel containing the opioid fentanyl from an international shipper to a U.S. address.

The investigation remains ongoing. However, this is the first investigation where we suspect that a Postal Service employee facilitated the illegal distribution of fentanyl.

Using evidence from this investigation, we searched the advance electronic data for more parcels sent from the same international address. We found more than 450 additional parcels sent between February and June of this year. The parcels were destined for locations nationwide, and other indicators suggested that many were suspicious.

We took the analysis a step further to see whether the U.S. addresses that received these suspect parcels received other international parcels, and we identified an additional international shipper that sent parcels to some of the same addresses. When we searched the data for this second shipper, we found more than 2,400 additional parcels shipped between February and June of 2017.

When we asked CBP, they confirmed they had seized a parcel containing fentanyl from the second shipper earlier this year. It appeared to us that this second shipper likely shared some customers with the first shipper, and in fact, one U.S. recipient received a total of 23 parcels from the two shippers. Using data analytics, we were able to turn shipping data from one fentanyl parcel into information about two suspect shippers and more than 2,800 suspicious parcels.

While our analysis is still ongoing and providing new insights daily, a number of opportunities are already clear. Analyzing advance electronic data in combination with other postal databases could shine a spotlight on international drug trafficking through the mail and facilitate prevention efforts in the originating countries. Additionally, in many instances, parcels from suspect shippers can be identified while they are still in transit between countries, which should help ensure they are seized at our border. And for those parcels that make it into the domestic mail stream, analytics will help law enforcement track down the individuals who are trafficking or receiving these dangerous opioids. All of these opportunities require resources and strong collaboration between federal agencies.

We have already met with representatives from CBP, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, the Postal Inspection Service, and the Postal Service to share these discoveries and to discuss how to work together in the future using analytics.

We believe this type of analysis is an exciting breakthrough for investigating trafficking through the mail, but there are a number of challenges ahead:

- First, more resources are needed to capitalize on these techniques, including more data experts and tools to generate leads and more assistance from law enforcement to follow them up.
- Second, although the amount of advance electronic data is growing, it is not yet available for all inbound parcels.
- Third, legal barriers to opening parcels may hinder investigations given the volume of suspect parcels.
- Finally, and most importantly, the successful use of analytics requires moving beyond traditional case-by-case, parcel-by-parcel investigative practices and instituting a high-level strategic, collaborative approach to stop drug trafficking through the mail.

If these challenges can be solved, data analytics promises to help government and law enforcement focus on the areas of greatest impact in order to prevent these dangerous opioids from entering our country in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our work. I am happy to answer any questions.