

Office of Inspector General | United States Postal Service

Audit Report

Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review – Parkland Branch, Tacoma, WA

Report Number 22-095-R22 | June 7, 2022





OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

June 7, 2022

MEMORANDUM FOR: PAMELA J. COOK
MANAGER, WASHINGTON DISTRICT

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph E. Wolski".

FROM: Joseph E. Wolski
Director, Field Operations

SUBJECT: Audit Report – Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review – Parkland Branch, Tacoma, WA (Report Number 22-095-R22)

This report presents the results of our audit of Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions – Parkland Branch, Tacoma, WA.

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

Attachment

cc: Postmaster General
Corporate Audit and Response Management
Vice President, Delivery Operations
Vice President, Retail & Post Office Operations
Vice President, WestPac Area
Chief Retail & Delivery Officer & Executive VP
Chief Logistics & Processing Operations Office & Executive VP

Results

Background

This interim report presents the results of our self-initiated audit of mail delivery, customer service, and property conditions at the Parkland Branch in Tacoma, WA (Project Number 22-095). The Parkland Branch is in the Washington District of the WestPac Area and services ZIP Codes 98444 through 98447,¹ which serves about 75,397 people and is considered an urban community.² We judgmentally selected the Parkland Branch based on the number of customer inquiries per route the unit received. From December 1, 2021, through February 28, 2022, the unit received 24.32 inquiries per route, which was more than the average of 11.05 inquiries per route for all sites serviced by the Seattle Processing and Distribution Center (P&DC).

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

Our objective was to evaluate mail delivery, customer service, and property conditions at the Parkland Branch in Tacoma, WA.

To accomplish our objective, we focused on these four audit areas: delayed mail, package scanning, truck arrival scans, 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, and distribution up-time.³ During our site visit from April 5-6, 2022, we reviewed mail conditions; package and truck arrival scanning procedures; and unit safety, security, and maintenance conditions. We also analyzed the scan status of mailpieces at the carrier cases and in the “Notice Left” area⁴ and interviewed unit management and employees. We discussed our observations and

conclusions as summarized in Table 1 with management on May 23, 2022, and included their comments where appropriate.

The Parkland Branch is one of four delivery units⁵ that the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) reviewed during the week of April 4, 2022, and that is serviced by the Seattle P&DC. We issued this interim report to provide the Postal Service with timely information regarding the conditions we identified at the Parkland Branch and will issue a separate report⁶ with the overall findings and recommendations for all four delivery units. See [Appendix A](#) for additional information about our audit scope and methodology.

Results Summary

We identified issues affecting mail delivery, customer service, and property conditions at the Parkland Branch. Specifically, we found issues with three of the four areas we reviewed (see Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of Results

Audit Area	Issues Identified	
	Yes	No
Delayed Mail		X
Package Scanning	X	
Truck Arrival Scanning	X	
Property Conditions	X	

Source: Results of our fieldwork during week of April 4, 2022.

1 The unit also services ZIP Codes 98412 and 98448, which are mainly used for post office boxes.

2 We obtained ZIP Code information related to population and urban/rural classification from Esri, which is based on 2010 Census Bureau information.

3 Time of day that clerks have completed distributing mail to the carrier routes.

4 The area of a postal facility where letters or packages that the carriers were unable to deliver are stored for customer pickup.

5 The other three units were Lacey Branch, Lacey, WA (Project Number 22-098); Kent Main Post Office, Kent, WA (Project Number 22-096); and Renton Main Post Office, Renton Highlands, WA (Project Number 22-097).

6 The Project Number for this report is 22-101.

Finding #1: Package Scanning

What We Found

Employees improperly scanned packages at the delivery unit. In total, employees scanned 633 packages at the delivery unit between December 2021 and February 2022 (see Table 2). Further analysis of scan data for these packages showed that about 35 percent were scanned “Delivered”. Note that this data excludes scans that could properly be made at a delivery unit, such as “Delivered - PO Box” and “Customer (Vacation) Hold”. Rather, the data represents scans performed at the delivery unit that should routinely be made at the point of delivery.

Table 2. Stop-the-Clock⁷ (STC) Scans at Delivery Unit

STC Scan Type	December	January	February	Total	Percent
Delivered	189	19	16	224	35.39%
Delivery Attempted – No Access to Delivery Location ⁸	120	64	32	216	34.12%
No Secure Location Available	44	39	17	100	15.80%
Receptacle Full / Item Oversized	31	28	10	69	10.90%
Refused	7	6	0	13	2.05%
Delivery Exception – Animal Interference	3	1	7	11	1.74%
Totals	394	157	82	633	100%

Source: OIG analysis of the Postal Service’s Product Tracking and Reporting (PTR) System⁹ data.

In addition, on the morning of April 5, 2022, before carriers arrived for the day, we selected 60¹⁰ packages to review and analyze scanning and tracking data. Of the 60 sampled packages, 14 (23 percent) had improper scans. These included:

- Seven that had a “Held at Post Office at Customer Request” scan but were either scanned 0.3 to 1.5 miles from the delivery point and/or scanned after 8:00 P.M.
- Five that had a “Delivery Attempted – No Access to Delivery Location” scan but were scanned 479 feet to 1.5 miles from the residential delivery point and were all scanned around 8:00 P.M.
- Two that had a “Delivered” scan which should only be performed when a package is successfully left at the customer’s point of delivery.

Further, seven packages in the “Notice Left” area were not returned to the sender, as required.¹¹ These packages ranged from one to 85 days past their return dates. In addition, one package was scanned “Return to Sender” and should have been returned to sender instead of being placed in the “Notice Left” area.

Why Did It Occur

These scanning issues occurred because management instructed carriers to perform improper STC scans when the carriers could not deliver the packages on their intended delivery day. Specifically, a supervisor stated that she instructed carriers to use the “Delivery Attempted – No Access to Delivery Location” and “Held at Post Office at Customer Request” STC scans for packages when carriers were running late on their route and would not be able to deliver each package. The branch manager stated that supervisors were instructed to ensure each package was delivered and given an STC scan. However, we determined he did not monitor scan performance and ensure supervisors were properly enforcing package scanning

⁷ A scan event that indicates the Postal Service has completed its commitment to deliver or attempt to deliver the mail piece. Examples of STC scans include “Delivered”, “Available for Pick-up”, and “No Access”.

⁸ For this STC scan type, we only included scans performed Monday through Friday to avoid legitimate scans for businesses closed over the weekend.

⁹ A system of record for all delivery status information for mail and packages with trackable services and barcodes.

¹⁰ We judgmentally selected 30 packages from the carrier cases and 30 packages from the “Notice Left” area.

¹¹ *Retail Digest*, dated May 11, 2021, states that 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.

practices. We referred these scanning practices to the OIG's Office of Investigations.

In addition, packages in the "Notice Left" area were not returned due to inadequate management oversight. Management stated that they did not assign a clerk to monitor and review package return dates daily.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have monitored scan performance daily and enforced compliance, including ensuring that packages were scanned at the delivery point and not at the delivery unit. The Postal Service's goal is to ensure proper delivery attempts for mailpieces to the correct address with proper service,¹² which includes scanning packages at the time and location of delivery.¹³ In addition, packages in the "Notice Left" area should have been reviewed for second notices and returned to sender if they remained after the prescribed number of days.

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 or properly handle packages in the "Notice Left" area, customers are unable to determine the actual status of their packages. By improving scanning and handling operations, management can potentially improve mail visibility, increase customer satisfaction, and enhance the customer experience and Postal Service brand.

¹² *Delivery Done Right the First Time* stand-up talk, March 2020.

¹³ *Carriers Delivering the Customer Experience* stand-up talk, July 2017.

Finding #2: Truck Arrival Scanning

What We Found

Employees at the Parkland Branch did not scan incoming trailer/truck barcodes¹⁴ as required. We reviewed data related to morning truck arrival scans from December 1, 2021 through February 28, 2022, and found that employees did not perform a scan for any of the 302 scheduled trucks arriving from the Tacoma, WA P&DC.

Why Did It Occur

Management did not ensure that employees were aware of the requirement to scan incoming mail trucks or monitor truck scanning performance. Specifically, the branch manager stated that in previous years the clerks were scanning incoming trailer/truck barcodes; however, he did not ensure the current morning supervisor was aware of the requirement. As a result, the morning supervisor did not assign a clerk to make the scans.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have instructed employees to scan the trucks and monitored truck scan performance. According to Postal Service Policy,¹⁵ employees must scan the trailer barcode on Postal Service trailer/trucks arriving at the delivery unit during local operating hours.

Effect on the Postal Service and its Customers

When employees do not scan the trailer/truck barcodes, the Postal Service does not receive timely transportation information and is unable to address issues that may be causing mail delays, which could affect customer service.

¹⁴ The 15-digit trailer barcode on the back door and inside right and left walls of the trailer.

¹⁵ *United States Postal Service Standard Operating Procedure – Subject: Trailer Scans at Delivery Units (DU)*.

Finding # 3: Property Conditions

What We Found

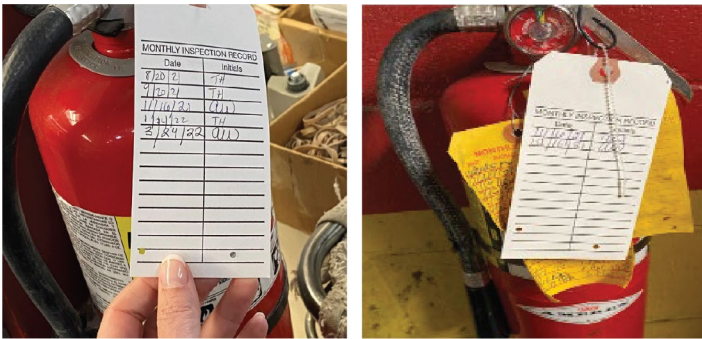
We found safety issues at the Parkland Branch including a blocked electrical panel, a blocked Inspection Service door (see Figure 1), fire extinguishers not being consistently inspected (see Figure 2 and Figure 3), and an exit door without an illuminated exit sign (see Figure 4).

Figure 1. Blocked Electrical Panel and Inspection Service Door



Source: OIG photos taken April 6, 2022.

Figure 2. Portable Fire Extinguishers Missing Monthly Inspections



Source: OIG photos taken April 6, 2022.

Figure 3. Portable Fire Extinguisher Missing Annual Inspections



Source: OIG photo taken April 6, 2022.

Figure 4. No Illuminated Exit Signs



Source: OIG photo taken April 6, 2022.

Why Did It Occur

Management did not provide sufficient oversight to ensure that facility safety issues were corrected, stating that getting the mail out for delivery each day impacted the timing of addressing the issues. The branch manager also stated that he attempted to purchase and install an illuminated exit sign several years earlier, but did not follow through to ensure completion.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have provided sufficient oversight to ensure that facility safety issues were monitored and addressed. The Postal Service is required to maintain a safe environment for employees and customers. In addition, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires employers to provide a safe and healthy workplace free of recognized hazards.¹⁶

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

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

Management's Comments

Management agreed with all findings in the report. See [Appendix B](#) for management's comments in their entirety.

¹⁶ OSHA Act of 1970 and Handbook EL-801, *Supervisor's Safety Handbook*.

Appendix A: Additional Information

We conducted this audit from March through June 2022 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.

We relied on computer-generated data from the PTR, the Surface Visibility¹⁷ database, and the electronic Facilities Management System.¹⁸ Although we did not test the validity of the controls over these systems, we assessed the accuracy of the data by reviewing existing information, comparing data from other sources, observing operations, and interviewing Postal Service officials knowledgeable about the data. We determined the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

¹⁷ Surface Visibility collects end-to-end data by linking multiple scans of a single asset to create visibility data to support planning, management, and optimization of the surface network.

¹⁸ 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



June 1, 2022

JOHN CIHOTA
DIRECTOR, AUDIT OPERATIONS

SUBJECT: Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review -
Parkland Post Office, Tacoma, WA Project Number 22-095-Parkland

Thank you for providing the Postal Service with an opportunity to review and comment on the findings contained in the draft audit report, Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review - Parkland Post Office, Tacoma, WA

Following are our comments on each of the three findings.

Findings #1:

Employees improperly scanned packages at the delivery unit. In total, employees scanned 633 packages at the delivery unit between December 2021 and February 2022. Further analysis of scan data for these packages showed that about 35 percent were scanned "Delivered". Note that this data excludes scans that could properly be made at a delivery unit, such as "Delivered - PO Box" and "Customer (Vacation) Hold". Rather, the data represents scans performed at the delivery unit that should routinely be made at the point of delivery.

Further, seven packages in the "Notice Left" area were not returned to the sender, as required. 12 These packages ranged from one to 85 days past their return dates. In addition, one package was scanned "Return to Sender" and should have been returned to sender instead of being placed in the "Notice Left" area

Management Response:

Management agrees with this finding.

Management states that due to inclement weather, delivery was impacted in the navigation of streets with snow and ice from about the week of December 27, 2022 to roughly the week of January 23, 2022. Some packages were scanned at the delivery unit and some were scanned at the address. Now all the packages are required to be scanned at the delivery location. Scans that are made in the office require additional follow up with the individual employee being given an official discussion and follow the progression to corrective action if necessary.

In addition, the left notice shelves were not being monitored by Management to ensure returns are current. Local Management now validates the left notice shelves daily prior

to the processing of RFS to ensure all pieces that should be returned are being returned timely.

See attachment showing:

- Left notice shelves - CURRENT
- Official discussion utilized to document talks with each employee that failed to "scan where you stand"

Finding #2:

Employees at the Parkland PO did not scan incoming trailer/truck barcodes (99T) as required.

Management Response:

Management agrees with this finding.

Management in Parkland have provided training and instruction on scanning the trailer/ trucks upon arrival and departure.

See attachment showing:

- Training records
- RIMS report of Arrival and Depart scans from April 18, 2022 to June 1, 2022

Finding #3:

We found safety issues at the Parkland Branch including a blocked electrical panel, a blocked Inspection Service door, fire extinguishers not being consistently inspected, and an exit door without an illuminated exit sign.

Management Response:

Management agrees with this finding.

Management states that all fire extinguishers have been checked by [REDACTED] and have been assigned to the custodian to perform monthly inspections by the 5 of each month as shown on attachments.

Blocked electrical panel and Inspection service doors were cleared immediately and are monitored daily by local Management as shown on attachment.

EXIT signs have been ordered and received with a scheduled installation date of June 2, 2022 by Seattle PDC Maintenance department. All supporting documentation will be sent upon completion.

See attachment showing:

- Fire extinguishers with required inspections.
- Areas cleared by electrical panels and Inspection service door.

As the District Manager, Washington District, I will ensure that we begin to address the findings identified in the report.



Pamela Cook
Washington District Manager

cc: Vice President, Delivery Operations
Vice President, Retail & Post Office Operations
Vice President, WestPac Area
Corporate Audit Response Management

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