## Office of Inspector General | United States Postal Service Audit Report Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Condition Reviews – Select Units, Seattle, WA Region

Report Number 22-101-R22 | July 28, 2022



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# Transmittal Letter

July 28, 2022 MEMORANDUM FOR:	PAMELA J. COOK MANAGER, WASHINGTON DISTRICT
MEMORANDUM FOR:	MANAGER, WASHINGTON DISTRICT
	Joseph E. Wolski
FROM:	Joseph E. Wolski Director, Field Operations
SUBJECT:	Audit Report – Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Condition Reviews – Select Units, Seattle, WA Region (Report Number 22-101-R22)
	nts the results of our audits of Mail Delivery, Customer Service, eviews - Select Units, Seattle, WA Region.
	ation and courtesies provided by your staff. If you have any nal information, please contact Jennifer Schneider, Operational 8-2100.
Attachment	
Vice President, Deliver Vice President, Retail Vice President, WestP Chief Retail & Delivery	& Post Office Operations ac Area Retail & Delivery Operations

## Results

## Background

This report presents a summary of the results of our self-initiated audits assessing mail delivery, customer service, and property conditions at four select delivery units in the Seattle, WA region (Project Number 22-101). These delivery units included the Parkland Branch in Tacoma, Kent Main Post Office (MPO) in Kent, Renton MPO in Renton, and Lacey Branch in Lacey. We judgmentally selected these delivery units based on the number of customer inquiries per route the unit received and Stop-the-Clock (STC)<sup>1</sup> scans occurring at the delivery unit. We previously issued interim reports<sup>2</sup> to district management for each of these units regarding the conditions we identified. In addition, we issued a report on the efficiency of operations at the Seattle Processing and Distribution Center (P&DC),<sup>3</sup> which services these four delivery units.

All four delivery units are in the Washington District of the WestPac Area and have a combined total of 135 city routes and 12 rural routes. Staffing at the delivery units during our audit included 155 full-time city carriers, one part-time city carrier, 17 city carrier assistants, 10 full-time rural carriers, two part-time rural carriers, two rural replacement carriers, 32 full-time clerks, and six postal support employees (see Table 1).

#### Table 1. Staffing and Routes

Staffing and Route Types	Parkland Branch	Kent MPO	Renton MPO	Lacey Branch	Total
Full-Time City Carriers	45	55	31	24	155
Part-Time City Carriers	0	0	0	1	1
City Carrier Assistants	4	4	3	6	17
Full-Time Rural Carriers	0	0	0	10	10
Part-Time Rural Carriers	0	0	0	2	2
Rural Replacement Carriers	0	0	0	2	2
Full-Time Clerks	9	11	7	5	32
Postal Support Employees (PSE)	2	1	1	2	6
City Routes	37	49	30	19	135
Rural Routes	0	0	0	12	12

Source: U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) analysis of data from variance programs.

The delivery units service about 300,282 people in several ZIP Codes, which are all considered urban communities<sup>4</sup> (see Table 2).

3 Efficiency of Operations at the Seattle, WA, Processing and Distribution Center (Report Number 22-094-R22, dated May 19, 2022).

<sup>1</sup> 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 Pick-up", and "No Access".

<sup>2</sup> Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review – Parkland Branch, Tacoma, WA (Report Number 22-095-R22, dated June 7, 2022); Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review – Kent Main Post Office, Kent, WA (Report Number 22-096-R22, dated June 7, 2022); Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review – Lacey Branch, Lacey, WA (Report Number 22-098-R22, dated June 7, 2022); and Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review – Lacey Branch, Lacey, WA (Report Number 22-098-R22, dated June 7, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> We obtained ZIP Code information related to population and urban/rural classification from ESRI.

#### **Table 2. Population Demographics**

Community	Parkland Branch	Kent MPO	Renton MPO	Lacey Branch	Total
Population	75,397	105,501	68,271	51,113	300,282
Туре	Urban	Urban	Urban	Urban	

Source: ESRI and 2010 Census Bureau Information.

## **Objective, Scope, and Methodology**

Our objective was to evaluate mail delivery, customer service, and property conditions at the Parkland and Lacey Branches, and the Kent and Renton MPOs in the Seattle, WA region.

We reviewed delivery metrics including the number of routes and carriers, mail arrival time, number of reported delayed mailpieces, package scanning, and distribution up-time.<sup>5</sup> In addition, during our site visits during the week of April 4, 2022, we reviewed mail conditions and delivery unit safety, security, and maintenance conditions. We also analyzed the scan status of mailpieces at and around the carrier cases and in the "Notice Left"<sup>6</sup> areas. Finally, we interviewed unit management and employees.

We conducted this audit from April through July 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 to provide a reasonable basis based on our audit objective.

objective. We discussed our observations and conclusions with management on July 1, 2022 and included their comments where appropriate.

We relied on computer-generated data from the Product Tracking and Reporting<sup>7</sup> (PTR) system, Delivery Condition Visualization<sup>8</sup>, the Surface Visibility<sup>9</sup> (SV) database, and the electronic Facilities Management System<sup>10</sup> (eFMS). 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.

### **Results Summary**

We identified issues affecting mail delivery, customer service, and property conditions at all four delivery units. Specifically, we found deficiencies with package scanning, truck arrival scanning, and property conditions (see Table 3).

#### Table 3. Summary of Results

Controls		Issues Identif	ied – Yes or No	
Reviewed	Parkland Branch	Kent MPO	Renton MPO	Lacey Branch
Delayed Mail	No	No	No	No
Package Scanning	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Truck Arrival Scanning	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Property Conditions	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Source: Results of OIG reviews conducted during the week of April 4, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Time of day when clerks have completed distributing mail to carrier routes.

<sup>6</sup> The area of a delivery unit where letters or packages the carriers were unable to deliver are stored for customer pickup.

<sup>7</sup> A system of record for all delivery status information for mail and packages with trackable services and barcodes.

<sup>8</sup> The Delivery Condition Visualization replaced the legacy Customer Service Daily Reporting System and allows users to manually input delayed and curtailed mail volume.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> 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.

## Finding #1: Package Scanning What We Found

Employees improperly conducted STC scanning on packages at all four delivery units, rather than at the customer's delivery address. Specifically, employees scanned 6,899 packages at the delivery units between December 2021 and February 2022 (see Table 4). Further analysis of the scan data for these packages showed that about 56 percent were scanned "Delivered." This

data excludes scans that could properly be made at a delivery unit, such as "Delivered - PO Box" and "Customer (Vacation) Hold" but, rather, represents scans performed at the delivery unit that should routinely be made at the point of delivery. In addition, we only included "Delivery Attempted – No Access to Delivery Location" scans performed Monday through Friday to avoid legitimate scans for businesses closed over the weekend.

#### Table 4. STC Scans at the Unit by Type

STC Scan Type	Parkland Branch	Kent MPO	Renton MPO	Lacey Branch	Total	Percentage
Delivered	224	3,405	56	172	3,857	55.9%
Delivery Attempted - No Access to Delivery Location	216	987	281	285	1,769	25.6%
No Secure Location Available	100	553	50	44	747	10.8%
Receptacle Full/Item Oversized	69	69	170	157	465	6.7%
Refused	13	8	N/A	4	25	0.4%
Delivery Exception - Animal Interference	11	4	3	1	19	0.3%
No Authorized Recipient Available	N/A	12	3	2	17	0.2%
Total	633	5,038	563	665	6,899	100%*

\* Total percentage does not equal 100 percent due to rounding. Source: OIG analysis of the Postal Service's PTR system.

In addition, on the morning of April 5, 2022, we judgmentally selected 120 packages from the carrier's cases and another 120 packages from the "Notice Left" area to review and analyze scanning and tracking data.

Of the 240 sampled packages, 53 (22.1 percent) had missing or improper scans including:

Thirteen from the carrier cases had a "Held at Post Office at Customer Request" scan that were scanned between 0.3 and 3.9 miles from their delivery points.

- Eleven from the carrier cases were missing an STC scan to let the customer know the reason for non-delivery.
- Eleven (10 from the carrier cases and one from the "Notice Left" area) had a "Return to Sender – Insufficient Address", "Vacant", or "Addressee Unknown" scan that should have been returned to the sender or redirected to the forwarding or correct address instead of remaining at the carrier's cases.

- Eight (seven from the carrier cases and one from the "Notice Left" area) had a "Delivered" scan, which should only be performed when a package is successfully left at the customer's point of delivery.
- Five from the carrier cases had a "Delivery Attempted No Access to Delivery Location" scan but were scanned 479 feet to 1.5 miles from the residential point of delivery and were all scanned around 8:00 P.M., indicating the carriers were running late on their route.
- Four (three from the carrier cases and one from the "Notice Left" area) were missing an "Arrival at Unit" scan, which is required for performance measurement.
- One from the carrier cases had a "Return to Post Office for Address Verification" scan that was scanned 245 feet from the point of delivery.

Further, we found 20 packages in the "Notice Left" area that were not returned to the sender, as required. These packages ranged from one to 85 days past their return dates.

#### Why Did it Occur

These scanning issues occurred because management did not adequately monitor and enforce proper package scanning and handling procedures. Specifically,

- A supervisor at the Parkland Branch stated 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. We referred these scanning practices to the OIG's Office of Investigations.
- Management at the Kent MPO stated that they knew they should monitor the scans but focused their attention on covering unstaffed routes.

- Delivery unit employees at the Renton MPO stated the unit was understaffed, and the postmaster was on extended leave, which impacted monitoring of the STC scans.
- The acting supervisor at the Lacey Branch was entering "Delivery Attempted -No Access to Delivery Location" scans for all items that remained on the End of Day Report<sup>11</sup> after the last carrier returned. Due to this improper practice, the individual is no longer acting in a supervisor role.

Furthermore, packages in the "Notice Left" area were not returned timely due to inadequate management oversight. Specifically, at the Parkland Branch, management stated they did not assign a clerk to monitor and review package return dates daily, and at the Kent MPO, the clerk primarily responsible for the "Notice Left" area also worked the retail window, so the "Notice Left" area was not always maintained.

#### 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,<sup>12</sup> which includes scanning packages at the time and location of delivery.<sup>13</sup>

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 Customer

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

11 The End of Day report displays the number of Arrival at Unit (AAU) scans, the number of STC scans, and the percentage of AAU scans with a corresponding STC scan for each facility in the user's Area or District.

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

<sup>13</sup> Carriers Delivering the Customer Experience stand-up talk, July 2017.

#### **Recommendation #1**

We recommend the **District Manager, Washington District**, develop and execute a plan to ensure all employees at the Parkland Branch, Kent Main Post Office, Renton Main Post Office, and Lacey Branch are trained on standard operating procedures for package scanning and handling and that unit management systematically reviews scan data and enforces compliance.

## Finding #2: Truck Arrival Scanning

#### What We Found

Employees at all four delivery units did not scan incoming trailer/truck barcodes<sup>14</sup> as required. We reviewed data related to morning truck arrival scans from December 1, 2021, through February 28, 2022, and found employees did not perform a scan for any of the 994 scheduled trucks arriving from the Seattle P&DC, South Delivery Distribution Center, Tacoma P&DC, and Olympia P&DC.<sup>15</sup>

#### Why Did it Occur

This occurred because management did not ensure truck scanning performance, as required. Specifically,

- Management at the Parkland Branch did not ensure employees were aware of the requirement to scan incoming mail trucks or monitor truck scanning performance. 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.
- The acting supervisor at the Kent MPO was unfamiliar with the proper truck scanning requirements and had not instructed employees to scan the truck barcodes.

- Management at the Renton MPO stated that they stopped scanning the incoming trucks because the scanners ceased to function properly due to a system upgrade. Management provided documentation showing the scanners were not working but did not provide documentation to support elevation of the matter to senior management and steps taken to resolve the issue.
- The Lacey Branch does not have a raised loading dock, and the clerks responsible for making the scans felt it was unsafe to use the lift to scan the barcode inside the truck. The station manager stated that he advised the clerks to have truck drivers make the scans for them but did not check whether the scans were being made.

#### What Should Have Happened

Management should have instructed employees to scan the trucks and monitored scan performance. According to Postal Service policy,<sup>16</sup> employees must scan the trailer barcode on Postal Service trailer/trucks and Highway Contract Route trucks arriving at the delivery unit during local operating hours.

Additionally, the Renton MPO management should have followed up on the issues with the scanners to ensure employees could resume scanning, and at the Lacey Branch, management should have elevated the issues with the loading dock to the Washington District management to let them know why clerks could not scan the barcodes. Then, management could have discussed modifications to the barcode scanning process.

#### Effect on the Postal Service and its Customer

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.

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

<sup>15</sup> The Parkland Branch receives mail from the Tacoma P&DC, the Kent MPO and Renton MPO receives mail from the Seattle P&DC and the South Delivery Distribution Center, and the Lacey Branch receives mail from the Olympia P&DC.

<sup>16</sup> United States Postal Service Standard Operating Procedure - Subject: Trailer Scans at the Delivery Units.

#### **Management Actions**

During our audit, management provided support for the following actions taken:

- Management at the Parkland Branch provided training documentation on truck scanning for three clerks and one PSE. In addition, management provided the Arrive Depart Tracking report<sup>17</sup> documenting the trucks were being scanned daily as of April 18, 2022.
- Management at the Renton MPO provided the Arrive Depart Tracking report documenting the trucks were being scanned daily as of May 18, 2022.

#### Recommendation # 2

We recommend the **District Manager, Washington District**, develop and execute a plan to ensure management at the Kent Main Post Office and Lacey Branch reviews truck/trailer arrival scanning performance daily and enforces compliance.

## Finding #3: Property Conditions

#### What We Found

We found safety and maintenance issues at all four delivery units. At the Parkland Branch, we identified issues including a blocked electrical panel, a blocked Inspection Service door (see Figure 1), fire extinguishers not being consistently inspected<sup>18</sup> (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 on April 6, 2022.



#### Figure 2. Portable Fire Extinguishers Missing Monthly Inspections

Source: OIG photos taken on April 6, 2022.

<sup>17</sup> The Arrive Depart Tracking Report is a custom report that displays all Arrive Depart records for scans in the current Area or District.

<sup>18</sup> Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) 29 CFR 1910.157(e)(2) and 29 CFR 1910.157(e)(3) requires that fire extinguishers be inspected monthly and annually.

#### Figure 3. Portable Fire Extinguisher Missing Annual Inspections



Source: OIG photo taken on April 6, 2022.

#### Figure 4. No Illuminated Exit Signs



Source: OIG photo taken on April 6, 2022.

At the Kent MPO, we identified issues including fire extinguishers not being consistently inspected (see Figure 5), cracked flooring in men's restroom (see Figure 6), holes in the walls (see Figure 7), and dirty air vents in the retail PO Box area and on the workroom floor area (see Figure 8).

#### Figure 5. Fire Extinguishers Missing Monthly Inspections



Source: OIG photo taken on April 6, 2022.

### Figure 6. Cracked Flooring in Men's Restroom



Source: OIG photo taken on April 6, 2022.

#### Figure 7. Holes in Walls

Workroom Floor Area



Source: OIG photos taken on April 6, 2022.

#### Figure 8. Dirty Air Vents

#### PO Box Retail Area



Source: OIG photos taken on April 6, 2022.

Inside Dock Area

Workroom Floor Area



At the Renton MPO, we identified issues including a blocked door and fire extinguisher (see Figure 9), five fire extinguishers had not been inspected (see Figure 10), two damaged lights in the parking lot, and stained and damaged ceiling tiles in the lobby and manager's office (see Figure 11).

#### Figure 9. Blocked Inspection Service Door and Fire Extinguisher



Source: OIG photos taken on April 6, 2022.

#### Figure 10. Fire Extinguisher not Inspected Monthly



Source: OIG photo taken on April 6, 2022.

#### Figure 11. Stained Ceiling Tiles in the Lobby



Source: OIG photo taken on April 6, 2022.

At the Lacey Branch, we identified issues including an exterior PO Box area door that does not close completely, and a lobby door in the PO Box area that is broken (taped up - see Figure 12).

Lobby Door

#### Figure 12. PO Box Area Doors

#### **Exterior Door**



Source: OIG photos taken on April 6, 2022.

#### 19 OSHA Act of 1970 and Handbook EL-801, Supervisor's Safety Handbook.

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#### Why Did it Occur

Management did not provide adequate oversight to ensure property condition issues were corrected. Management stated other duties - such as addressing customer inquiries and getting the mail out for delivery each day - impacted how timely issues were addressed. Specifically, at the Parkland Branch, management stated they attempted to purchase and install an illuminated exit sign several years earlier but did not follow through to ensure completion. At the Kent MPO, the prior supervisor responsible for overseeing property safety and maintenance issues left last year and did not address the issues before departing. The current supervisor was not aware the fire extinguishers needed to be inspected. At the Renton MPO, management stated they did not address the issues due to an oversight. Local management reported the parking lot lighting issue in eFMS in January and October 2020 but did not effectively pursue the repair when the local field maintenance office declined the project. Additionally, the Lacey Branch management stated they were not aware the PO Box area door did not close completely. Regarding the broken lobby door that was taped up, management submitted a repair request in May 2021, but did not take additional steps when the local field maintenance office declined to do the repair.

#### What Should Have Happened

Management should have provided sufficient oversight to ensure facility safety and maintenance issues were monitored and addressed. The Postal Service is required to maintain a safe environment for employees and customers. In addition, OSHA requires employers to provide a safe and healthy workplace free of recognized hazards.<sup>19</sup>

#### Effect on the Postal Service and its Customer

Management's attention to safety and maintenance 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 Actions**

During our audit, management provided support for the following actions taken:

- Management at the Parkland Branch provided documentation showing the blocked electrical panel and Inspection Service door were cleared, and the fire extinguisher inspections were current.
- Management at the Renton MPO provided documentation showing the blocked door and fire extinguisher were cleared, the fire extinguisher inspections were current, the damaged lights in the parking lot, and the damaged ceiling tiles in the lobby and manager's office were repaired.
- Management at the Lacey Branch provided documentation showing the exterior PO Box area door and the lobby door in the PO Box area were repaired.

#### **Recommendation #3**

We recommend the **District Manager, Washington District**, address all building safety and maintenance issues identified at the Parkland Branch and Kent Main Post Office.

## **Management's Comments**

Management agreed with the findings and recommendations in this report. See Appendix A for management's comments in their entirety.

Regarding recommendation 1, management is implementing a process for documenting compliance of scanning procedures at all four units. Specifically, units with scanning failures will undergo scanning training. Repeat offenders will be given an official discussion and, if training is not sufficient, progressive corrective action will be taken. The target implementation date is July 26, 2022. Regarding recommendation 2, management stated that they have implemented a log system to monitor and track truck scanning compliance. At the Lacey Branch, additional data is monitored and reviewed using Regional Intelligent Mail Scanners and SV to validate compliance. At the Kent MPO, management is coordinating with Transportation, the plant, and headquarters to address the continuity issues between the Mobile Delivery Device (MDD) and SV scanners. Transportation will update all truck barcodes for the district, which will correspond with both SV and MDD scanners. In addition, district management will monitor compliance for arrive/depart going forward to ensure that all units are in compliance. The target implementation date is August 30, 2022.

Regarding recommendation 3, management provided updated pictures of the work completed and a work order was submitted to complete sanding and painting at the Kent MPO. The target implementation date is August 30, 2022.

### **Evaluation of Management's Comments**

The OIG considers management's comments responsive to the recommendations in the report. All recommendations require OIG concurrence before closure. Consequently, the OIG requests written confirmation when corrective actions are completed. Recommendations 2 and 3 should not be closed in the Postal Service's follow-up tracking system until the OIG provides written confirmation that the recommendations can be closed. We consider recommendation 1 closed with the issuance of this report.

## Appendix A: Management's Comments

POSTA	D STATES L SERVICE
July 20	5, 2022
	CIHOTA CTOR, AUDIT OPERATIONS
	ECT: Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Condition Reviews – Units, Seattle, WA Region (Project Number 22-101).
on the	you for providing the Postal Service with an opportunity to review and commer recommendations contained in the draft report, Mail Delivery, Customer e, and Property Conditions Reviews – Select Units, Seattle, WA.
Manag	ement agrees with all findings/recommendations:
Distric Branch trained	mmendation # 1: We recommend the District Manager, Washington at, develop and execute a plan to ensure all employees at the Parkland h, Kent Main Post Office, Renton Main Post Office, and Lacey Branch are l on standard operating procedures for package scanning and handling and hit management systematically reviews scan data and enforces compliance.
	ement provided emails, showing the enforcement of documented behavior of ocedures for scan data for Parkland, Kent, Renton and Lacey.
scans: • •	its with scanning failure the following has been taken to address missing (Currently we have no corrective action taken on these units employees) Scanning training for "Scan where you stand" at the delivery point conducted at all units with all employees. Employees who are repeat offenders will be given an official discussion along with retraining for subsequent scanning failures. Progressive corrective action to be taken if re-training is not sufficient to correct the deficiency.
TID Da	ate: 7/26/2022
Respo	nsible Official: Area MPOOs
develo Lacey compli	<ul> <li>mendation # 2: We recommend the District Manager, Washington District, p and execute a plan to ensure management at the Kent Main Post Office, and Branch reviews truck/trailer arrival scanning performance daily and enforces ance.</li> <li>Lacey Station:         <ul> <li>Lacey has seen significant improvement in arrive/depart scanning in</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	the last 30 days.



- 4 -2 Mer John Morgan // Manager, Washington District (A) cc: Chief Retail & Delivery Officer Vice President, Retail & Post Office Operations (WestPac) Corporate Audit Response Management



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