

September 10, 1999

MICHELE C. PURTON  
NORTHLAND DISTRICT MANAGER

Subject: Management Advisory Report - Complaint  
Resolution Process, Mankato Post Office  
(DS-MA-99-006)

This management advisory report summarizes the results of our review of the allegation of mail delivery problems in Mankato, Minnesota (Project 99PR005DS000). The report responds to a request made by Congressman Gil Gutknecht of Minnesota to review an allegation that the Mankato Post Office did not always deliver a customer's mail.

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## **Results in Brief**

During this review, we confirmed that the customer did not receive mail during the week of November 11, 1998. In addition, we determined that Mankato postal officials did not adequately respond to the customer's complaint regarding non-receipt of mail. Further, Mankato postal officials did not properly record and process the customer's complaint as required by postal policy.

We suggest that the Northland District Manager direct Mankato Post Office management to properly record and process all future complaints.

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## **Background**

USPS management recognizes that prompt response to and viable resolution of customer complaints positively impact customer satisfaction. As such, postal employees are to ensure timely, customer-friendly, and professional complaint resolution.

The complaint resolution process<sup>1</sup> begins when USPS officials receive a complaint from a business or residential customer. Postal personnel are only required to document

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<sup>1</sup> Management Instruction, PO-250-93-2, Complaint Resolution and Proper Use of the Consumer Service Card

the complaint in the customer complaint control log, if resolved immediately. However, if the complaint cannot be resolved immediately, the customer or postal employee completes a four-part form, Consumer Service Card (PS Form 4314). This form should be completed at the time of the initial complaint. When follow-up action must be taken or the comment or complaint must be referred elsewhere for action or resolution, a postal employee is responsible for completing the form.

Once the complaint form is completed, local post office personnel must enter the information in the customer Complaint Control Log using the Consumer Service Card number as the control number. On the same date the form is completed, local post office personnel must send copy 2 of the form to the St. Louis Consumer Service Card Unit. Within 24 hours of receiving the complaint, the Postal Service must acknowledge the complaint by preprinted postcard, letter, telephone call, or personal contact with the customer.

Local post office personnel must investigate the complaint and provide the customer a final response within 14 days. The results, including the customer contact date, the USPS representative making contact, and a brief description of the action taken, are documented on copy 3 of the complaint form. Copy 3 of the form is then sent immediately to the Consumer Service Card Unit. Copy 4 is filed locally, along with any letters or attachments. The local post office personnel must enter the date the complaint is closed in the customer complaint control log, finalizing the complaint resolution process. Following this process ensures effective complaint resolution accountability and allows for correction of any service deficiencies that may exist.

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**Objective, Scope and Methodology**

Our objective was to review the facts surrounding an allegation that the Mankato Post Office did not always deliver a customer's mail. To accomplish our objective, we interviewed postal officials and the complainant regarding the allegation. We evaluated whether the Mankato Post Office officials followed proper policy and procedures for recording and processing this customer's complaint. In performing our review, we also reviewed USPS policies and other related documents. The review was conducted

between March and August 1999, in accordance with the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency, Quality Standards for Inspection.

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**Observation**

We reviewed the facts surrounding the alleged mail delivery problem and determined that the customer had not received mail during the week of November 11, 1998. Due to conflicting information from the complainant and postal officials, we could not determine a specific cause for the mail delivery problem. However, during our review, we found that Mankato postal management did not properly record and process the customer's complaint. Our interviews with the complainant and postal officials revealed that the customer voiced concerns about mail delivery, although no formal complaint was documented. Specifically, the supervisor of the delivery route in question acknowledged at least one conversation with the complainant concerning non-delivery of mail. In addition, the Postmaster spoke with the complainant and did investigate the customer's complaint. However, neither the supervisor nor the Postmaster considered the complaint valid and, therefore, did not record the complaint on a Consumer Service Card as required. As a result, postal officials did not establish effective complaint resolution accountability and did not correct any service deficiencies that may have potentially existed for this particular customer.

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**Suggestion**

We suggest that the District Manager direct Mankato Post Office management to properly record and process all future complaints.

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**Summary of Management's Comments**

The Northland Senior Manager, Post Office Operations concurred with our observation and suggestion and stated that actions had been taken to require Mankato Postal employees to complete PS Form 4314 for all complaints. In addition, employees are required to document customer complaints using a Complaint Control Log: if the complaint cannot be resolved immediately; when follow-up action must be taken on the complaint; or the complaint must be referred somewhere else for action or resolution. We have summarized management's comments in the report and included the full text in the appendix.

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**Evaluation of  
Management's  
Comments**

Management's comments are responsive to our suggestion and the actions taken to document all complaints will ensure proper recording and processing of customer complaints.

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

*//Signed//*

Richard F. Chambers  
Assistant Inspector General  
for Performance

cc: William McComb  
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**Major Contributors to  
the Report:**

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POST OFFICE OPERATIONS



August 26, 1999

TIM MILLIKEN  
ACTING DIRECTOR  
DELIVERY & SUPPORT OPERATIONS

SUBJECT: Mankato Post Office (DS-MA-99-Draft)

Background and Investigation Conducted by Postmaster

Complainant resides at [REDACTED] during the summer months and spends the winter in San Francisco. He had shared the residence with his mother, who passed away several years ago, and is in the process of trying to sell the house. He has a "For Sale" sign nailed to a tree in the yard and another nailed to a telephone pole.

At the time of the complaint, the complainant had a sign on the front door that said, "No Mail." He also had a towel stuck in the mail slot. While attempting delivery, the mail carrier saw the complainant through the window and then knocked on the door to inquire about holding or forwarding his mail. The complainant did not answer the door and the carrier brought back the mail to the office, assuming he would get a temporary hold or forwarding order in a day or two, as was the case in the past.

Several days later the customer called the Postmaster complaining about not getting any delivery. The Postmaster sent a Supervisor, Customer Service, to investigate the complaint. The supervisor was able to make personal contact with the customer and the issue was resolved. The entire sequence of events took approximately one week from when the mail carrier first attempted delivery. The Postmaster considered the complaint resolved and the matter closed.

The Mankato Post Office did not complete a 4314C for several reasons; nor did the customer choose to complete one. The Postmaster sent a supervisor to investigate and to meet with the customer to resolve the complaint soon after receiving the customer's call. The complaint did not have to be referred elsewhere for action as a resolution was arrived at by the Mankato Post Office.

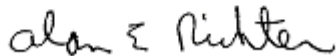
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By directing a member of his supervisory staff to meet with [REDACTED] at his residence to resolve the complaint, the Postmaster clearly indicated that he thought the complaint was valid and wanted it resolved immediately. It was the Postmaster's opinion, since he did not have to refer the complaint outside of the Mankato office and a resolution was arrived at immediately, that it was not necessary to complete a 4314C.

Action Plan

Effective August 22, 1999, Postal employees of Mankato will be required to document customer complaints using a Complaint Control Log if: 1) the complaint cannot be resolved immediately; 2) when follow-up action must be taken on the complaint; or 3) the complaint must then be referred elsewhere for action or resolution. In each case, the person taking the complaint will complete the PS 4314.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 612-349-4404.



Alan E. Richter  
Sr. Manager, Post Office Operations

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James R. Kirschbaum  
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