

August 25, 2000

KENNETH C. WEAVER  
CHIEF POSTAL INSPECTOR

SUBJECT: Review of Area Case Investigations  
(Report Number OV-MA-00-003)

This management advisory report presents the results of our review of area case investigations (Project Number 99CA002OV000). This review was included in our fiscal year 1999 annual workload plan.

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**Results in Brief**

Our review revealed opportunities to strengthen the management and oversight of area case investigations. We found that supervisory oversight was generally limited to team leaders who used informal procedures to manage area case investigations at the sample divisions reviewed. In addition, Inspection Service division and headquarters management did not have an effective means of monitoring area case investigative activities. For example, Inspection Service officials did not maintain readily available records of hours charged and activities performed for specific investigations under area cases.

We suggested that the chief postal inspector issue guidance and implement a system to manage and track the status of area case investigations. Management agreed with our suggestions and plans to initiate corrective action to address the issues identified in this report. Management's comments, in their entirety, are included in the appendix of this report.

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**Background**

Postal inspectors use area cases as a mechanism for tracking and charging time while performing investigative and other mission-related activities. For investigations, inspectors charge time to area cases when reviewing allegations and complaints that have not reached the point where it becomes possible to prosecute or take

administrative action against a suspect. Other investigative work charged to area cases includes proactive work, such as observing mail shipments for contraband.

Inspectors also charge other mission-related time to area cases. Examples of such work include conducting public presentations in preventing credit card theft, recruiting, and attending meetings.

Area cases enable postal inspectors to account for their criminal investigative work hours without the administrative burden of jacketing a case.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, area cases enable postal inspectors to account for their work hours without jacketing a case for every allegation and complaint received or every proactive and preventative measure taken.

Area cases are identified by case numbers sequentially generated by the Inspection Service Data Base Information System. Area cases also are identified by a unique, three-digit case code that precedes all case numbers and describes the type of investigative or other mission-related activity.

Area cases represent a significant portion of the Inspection Service's criminal investigative efforts. From October 1, 1997, through May 31, 1999, postal inspectors charged approximately 48 percent of criminal investigative hours to area cases.

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#### Area Case Policy

The Inspection Service Manual provides guidance for using area cases. The Inspection Service Manual defines an area case as the preliminary phase of an investigation. It identifies that area cases will be jacketed to a specialist or team leader in each division. The Inspection Service Manual also provides guidance for tracking suspects during area case investigations and how long area cases should remain open. The Inspection Service Manual further provides guidance for other mission-related area casework. For example, it provides instruction for crime prevention activities and identifies when to jacket a case for problems identified from such activities.

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<sup>1</sup>Jacketing a case signifies the initiation of an investigation.

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Criminal Investigative Area Cases	<p>The Inspection Service classifies its criminal investigative work under various programs, such as security, fraud, internal crimes, and external crimes. A team leader assigned to a criminal investigative program may have an area case that every member of the team may charge time to while working investigations related to that program. An inspector normally works multiple investigations under an area case. An inspector working investigations under area cases may find allegations that are unsubstantiated. In these instances, the inspector may close or suspend the investigations without formally documenting the proceedings. Inspectors do not charge time to area cases for certain violations, such as robberies and detonation of mail bombs. Investigations are immediately jacketed for these types of offenses.</p>
Case Jacketing	<p>If an investigation under an area case results in evidence gathered to support potential administrative or prosecutive action against a suspect, the inspector requests that the investigation be jacketed. When an area case investigation is jacketed, the Inspection Service Data Base Information System generates a new case number, resulting in the investigation carrying a unique identifier.</p> <p>The <u>Inspection Service Manual</u> requires a greater level of management control by the field offices over jacketed cases than is required for area cases. Examples of this control include reviews of case files and requirements for case activity and specialty reports to be entered into the Inspection Service Data Base Information System. This level of control requires that inspectors document their investigative progress. Inspection Service management does not normally apply these controls to area case investigations.<sup>2</sup> Rather, management allows team leaders to institute the controls they deem necessary for area case investigations. Such controls include regular meetings with team members to discuss work in progress, planned investigative approaches, and instances from which to jacket cases.</p>

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<sup>2</sup>Management controls for activities under area and jacketed cases are the same in some instances, such as obtaining evidence, making payments to informants, and performing electronic surveillance.

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**Objective, Scope, and Methodology**

Our objective was to evaluate the management and oversight of area case criminal investigations. We reviewed 299 judgmentally selected criminal investigations under 34 judgmentally selected area cases in the Miami and Northeast divisions. We examined the contents of investigative files to determine procedures used by

Inspectors and to evaluate management oversight related to area case investigations. We interviewed Inspection Service Headquarters officials, division managers,<sup>3</sup> team leaders, and inspectors at 11 field offices in the 2 divisions. We also examined inspectors' diaries and reviewed time reports.

This review was conducted from February 1999 through July 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.

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**Management and Oversight**

Opportunities exist to strengthen the management and oversight of area case investigations. We found that team leaders at the sample divisions reviewed relied on informal procedures to manage area case investigations since there was little published guidance addressing the process.<sup>4</sup> We also found that inspectors could perform many of the same investigative techniques under area case investigations without the controls required if the techniques were performed under a jacketed investigation.

The absence of procedures and controls allowed area case investigations to proceed with limited management oversight. Specifically, we noted that:

1. Investigative files did not always provide clear investigative trails, making subsequent reviews difficult.
2. Inspectors were not required to document progress reports on area case investigations, leaving no readily available summary of work, including significant work.

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<sup>3</sup>Division managers are considered to be those at a field division at the assistant inspector in charge level and higher.

<sup>4</sup>The Inspection Service Manual provides guidance for selected activities that could be performed under area cases including obtaining evidence, providing payments to informants, and performing electronic surveillance.

3. Area case investigations could be suspended or terminated without reporting the results of the investigative efforts.
4. Supervisors were generally not required to periodically review most ongoing area case investigative activities.

Further, we identified that management above the team leader level did not have a ready source of information to identify and control area case investigative activities. Rather, management had to contact the responsible team leader or inspector to obtain the status of investigative efforts and case progression.

Investigative Trail	<p>Team leaders at the sample divisions reviewed worked with inspectors to determine if criminal activity occurred. However, headquarters and field office management above the team leader level had no readily available record of the investigative effort for area case investigations. Inspectors generally had documentation for each investigation. However, the manner in which the documentation was maintained varied within each individual area case and among separate area cases. As a result, there was not a clear and consistent investigative trail for area case activity.</p>
Progress Reports	<p>The same investigative techniques may be performed in area case investigations as in jacketed case investigations. We noted that inspectors at the sample divisions reviewed gathered personal information related to drivers licenses, medical records, social security information, bank statements, credit reports, phone records, and credit card purchases during the performance of area case investigations. Inspectors also conducted an undercover operation, obtained mail covers, and conducted a trash cover.</p> <p>While headquarters management required detailed reporting of investigative efforts under jacketed case investigations, there were no such requirements for area case investigations. As a result, headquarters' management and field management above the team leader level had no ready means to monitor the same efforts conducted under area cases. Further, management at all levels did not have ready access to the progress of each</p>

investigation, hours spent per investigation, and work deferred.

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Suspended or  
Terminated  
Investigations

Inspectors submit their final report and/or case jacket to their immediate supervisor for review and approval for jacketed investigations. Team leaders and/or inspectors in charge review and ensure that all official files for cases to be closed are prepared and reviewed in detail before they are closed. However, no such requirements exist for inspectors conducting investigative procedures under area cases. When supervisors are not required to approve the closure or suspension of area case inquiries that employ major efforts or investigative procedures, there is an increased risk that Inspection Service resources are not being used effectively and decisions related to the initiation of cases and suspension of inquiries are not being appropriately made.

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Supervisory Reviews

Team leaders met with supervisors to review work-in-progress. Management stated that these meetings sometimes included area case investigations. However, management was unable to provide us with specific case information or documentation related to the discussions and review of area cases.

Inspection Service officials identified that team leaders' supervisors participated in domicile reviews.<sup>5</sup> However, the procedures used in these reviews, as well as the biannual quality assurance reviews, primarily address jacketed case investigations. We further identified that sufficient guidance did not exist for team leaders to exercise supervision over area case investigations. Specifically, the Inspection Service Manual provided little guidance for supervising area case investigations. We found no other Inspection Service resources that provided such guidance.

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<sup>5</sup>Domicile reviews are quality assurance reviews conducted internally by a division.

Tracking System	<p>As a law enforcement agency, the Inspection Service has the authority to obtain information not available to the public. A tracking system would improve oversight, allow managers at all levels to match staff workload, aid in strategic planning, and assist in improving area case processes. Further, a tracking system would help provide a means of control to ensure that citizens' rights and privacy are protected when such information is collected.</p> <p>Approximately 48 percent of the Inspection Service's criminal investigative effort from October 1, 1997, through May 31, 1999, was expended for area case investigations.<sup>6</sup> This amount of work represents a significant effort in investigative hours and resources. A tracking system would assist in keeping headquarters and field office managers informed of area cases and provide instantaneous access to area case investigative efforts. The tracking system could be part of an existing or planned system, and would not necessarily require jacketing a case for every matter investigated.</p>
<b>Suggestion</b>	<p>We offer the following suggestions:</p> <p>The chief postal inspector should:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Establish guidance to govern the management and oversight of area cases. Specifically, the guidance should:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establish standards for documenting and periodically reporting the progress of all area cases.</li><li>• Require written supervisory approval for the closure or suspension of all area case investigations.</li><li>• Require periodic supervisory review of all area cases.</li></ul></li></ol>
<b>Management's Comments</b>	<p>The chief postal inspector agreed with our suggestion and identified that during fiscal year 2001, management will devise, develop, and implement a consistent policy for all area cases. The chief postal inspector further identified that management will consider a variety of issues, such as new</p>

<sup>6</sup>This percentage is based on criminal investigative work hours provided by Inspection Service officials, excluding hours associated with tort investigations and crime prevention.

subject codes, opening and closing conventions, case file maintenance, investigative summary logs, periodic written progress reports, and supervisory reviews, during domicile reviews and self-assessments.

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**Evaluation of Management's Comments**

Management's planned actions are responsive to our suggestion and should help strengthen the management and oversight of area case investigations.

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**Suggestion**

2. Implement a tracking system, which could be a part of an existing or planned system, for area case investigations that maintains data on investigative hours, milestones, and investigative techniques. The system should also match staff to workload, aid in strategic planning, and assist in improving area case processes and oversight.

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**Management's Comments**

The chief postal inspector agreed with our suggestion and identified that area case policy will utilize the Inspection Service Database Information System, with necessary enhancements, to strengthen area case and program management.

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**Evaluation of Management's Comments**

Management's planned actions are responsive to our suggestion and should help support the monitoring of area case investigative activities.

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

Debra D. Pettitt  
Acting Assistant Inspector General  
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cc: James K. Belz  
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## APPENDIX. MANAGEMENT'S COMMENTS

KENNETH C. WEAVER  
CHIEF POSTAL INSPECTOR



August 3, 2000

KARLA W. CORCORAN  
INSPECTOR GENERAL

SUBJECT: Draft Management Advisory – Review of Area Case Investigations  
(Report Number OV-MA-00-DRAFT)

Area cases are used to conduct preliminary investigations and perform proactive and preventive measures. If an investigation under an area case results in evidence to support potential administrative or prosecutive action, a specific case regarding that investigation is jacketed.

We agree with your observation that opportunities exist to strengthen the management and oversight of area case investigations. We have reviewed the two suggestions in this draft management advisory and offer the following response.

1. Establish guidance to govern the management and oversight of area cases.  
During FY2001, we intend to devise, develop and implement a consistent policy for all area cases. We will consider a variety of issues, such as, new subject codes, opening and closing conventions, case file maintenance, investigative summary logs, periodic written progress reports, as well as supervisory reviews during domicile reviews and self-assessments.
2. Implement a tracking system, which could be a part of an existing or planned system, for area case investigations that maintains data on investigative hours, milestones, and investigative techniques. The policy established during FY2001 will utilize ISDBIS, with necessary enhancements, to strengthen area case and program management.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "K. C. Weaver".

K. C. Weaver

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**Major Contributors to [REDACTED]  
This Report**