

Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review - Lewiston Main Post Office, Lewiston, ME

AUDIT REPORT

Report Number 23-076-2-R23 | May 10, 2023



Transmittal Letter



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

May 10, 2023

MEMORANDUM FOR: REGINA M. BUGBEE
MANAGER, MAINE NEW HAMPSHIRE VERMONT DISTRICT

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Joseph E. Wolski", is positioned below the memorandum header.

FROM: Joseph E. Wolski
Director, Field Operations

SUBJECT: Audit Report – Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions
Review - Lewiston Main Post Office, Lewiston, ME
(Report Number 23-076-2-R23)

This report presents the results of our audit of Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review - Lewiston Main Post Office, Lewiston, ME.

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

Attachment

cc: Postmaster General
Corporate Audit and Response Management
Chief Retail & Delivery Officer & Executive Vice President
Vice President, Delivery Operations
Vice President, Retail & Post Office Operations
Vice President, Atlantic Area Retail & Delivery Operations
Director, Retail & Post Office Operations Maintenance

Results

Background

This interim report presents the results of our self-initiated audit of mail delivery, customer service, and property conditions at the Lewiston Main Post Office (MPO) in Lewiston, ME (Project Number 23-076-2). The Lewiston MPO is in the Maine-New Hampshire-Vermont District of the Atlantic Area and services ZIP Code 04240. This ZIP Code serves about 36,592 people in a predominantly urban area.¹ This delivery unit has five rural routes and 22 city routes. We selected the Lewiston MPO based on a request from Senator Susan Collins.

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

Our objective was to evaluate mail delivery, customer service, and property conditions at the Lewiston MPO in Lewiston, ME.

To accomplish our objective, we focused on five audit areas: delayed mail, package scanning, truck arrival scans, arrow keys,² 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 we reviewed mail conditions; package and truck arrival scanning procedures; arrow key security procedures; and unit safety, security, and maintenance conditions. We also analyzed the scan status of mail pieces 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 April 27, 2023, and included their comments where appropriate.

The Lewiston MPO is one of five delivery units⁵ the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) reviewed during the week of March 13, 2023, that are serviced by the Southern Maine Processing and Distribution Center. We are issuing this interim report to provide the Postal Service with timely information regarding conditions we identified at the Lewiston MPO. We will issue a separate report⁶ that provides the Postal Service with the overall findings and recommendations for all five delivery units. See [Appendix A](#) for additional information about our scope and methodology.

Results Summary

We identified issues affecting mail delivery, customer service, and property conditions at the Lewiston MPO. Specifically, we found issues with all five 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	
Arrow Keys	X	
Property Conditions	X	

Source: Results of our fieldwork during the week of March 13, 2023.

¹ We obtained ZIP Code information related to population and urban/rural classification from Esri, which is based on 2010 Census Bureau information. Of the people living in this ZIP Code, about 33,768 (92 percent) are considered living in urban and about 2,824 (8 percent) in rural communities. The unit also services ZIP Codes 04241 and 04243, which are used for PO Boxes and business customers.

² A distinctively shaped key carriers use to open mail-receiving receptacles such as street collection boxes and panels of apartment house mailboxes equipped with an arrow lock. Arrow keys are accountable property and are subject to strict controls.

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

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

⁵ The other four units are Industrial Park Annex, Saco, ME (Project Number 23-076-1), Main Office Carrier Section, Portland, ME (Project Number 23-076-3), Sanford Main Post Office, Sanford, ME (Project Number 23-076-4), and Southern Maine Carrier Unit, Scarborough, ME (Project 23-076-5).

⁶ Project Number 23-076.

Finding #1: Delayed Mail

What We Found

On the morning of March 14, 2023, we identified 10,858⁷ delayed mail pieces at 25 carrier cases, the hot case⁸ distribution area, and the Delivery Point Sequence (DPS)⁹ staging area. This mail included three feet of DPS mail from Saturday, March 11, 2023. In addition, management did not accurately report this mail as undelivered in the Delivery Condition Visualization (DCV)¹⁰ system. While they reported 4,630 delayed mail pieces, this represented only 42.64 percent of the delayed volume we identified at the unit. See Table 2 for the number of pieces for each mail type and Figures 1 and 2 for examples of delayed mail found at the DPS staging area and at carrier cases.

Figure 1. Delayed Mail in DPS Staging Area



Source: OIG photo taken on March 14, 2023.

Figure 2. Examples of Delayed Mail in the Carrier Cases



Source: OIG photos taken on March 14, 2023.

Why Did It Occur

Management stated the Lewiston MPO did not have enough employees to deliver the mail each day. Vacancy data provided by the District Manager of Field Human Resources showed that the Lewiston MPO was understaffed by four part time city carriers and two part time rural carriers as of March 24, 2023. Further, management stated the unit faced carrier medical restrictions for 12 city carriers and has a vacant rural auxiliary¹¹ route, which made it difficult to cover the existing workload. Management stated that competing responsibilities prevented them from monitoring and verifying that all mail was cleared

Table 2. Type of Delayed Mail

Type of Mail	Carrier Cases	DPS Staging Area	Hot Case	OIG Estimated Count of Delayed Mail
Letters	6,526	3,367	127	10,020
Flats	771	0	3	774
Packages	64	0	0	64
Totals	7,361	3,367	130	10,858

Source: OIG count of delayed mail pieces identified during our visit on March 14, 2023.

⁷ OIG estimate based on individual piece counts and Postal Service conversion factors in Management Instruction PO-610-2007-1, *Piece Count Recording System*.

⁸ A case designated for final withdrawal of mail as carriers leave the office.

⁹ The area where carriers pick up delivery point sequence mail as they leave the office.

¹⁰ A tool for unit management to manually self-report delayed mail, which provides a snapshot of daily mail conditions at the point in time when carriers have departed for the street.

¹¹ A route that takes less than eight hours to deliver.

from the unit and taken to the street for delivery and from updating the DCV system prior to the end of the business day.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have made sure that it had sufficient staff so that all mail would be delivered on the day it was committed for delivery. Postal Service policy¹² states that all types of First-Class Mail, Priority Mail, and Priority Express Mail are always committed for delivery on the day of receipt. In addition, managers are required¹³ to report all mail in the delivery unit after the carriers have left for their street duties as either delayed or curtailed in DCV. Further, management must update DCV if volumes have changed prior to the end of the business day.

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

When mail is delayed, there is an increased risk of customer dissatisfaction, which may adversely affect the Postal Service brand. In addition, inaccurate reporting of delayed mail in the DCV system provides management at the local, district, area, and headquarters levels with an inaccurate status of mail delays and can result in improper actions taken to address issues.

¹² *Committed Mail & Color Code Policy for Marketing Mail* stand-up talk, February 2019.

¹³ *Informed Visibility Delivery Condition Visualization User Guide*, September 2022.

Finding #2: Package Scanning

What We Found

Employees improperly scanned packages at the delivery unit. In total, employees scanned 1,466 packages at the delivery unit between November 2022 and January 2023. Further analysis of the Stop the Clock (STC)¹⁴ scan data for these packages showed that 54.37 percent of the scans were scanned “Delivery Attempted–No Access” (see Table 3). This data excludes “Delivery Exception – Local Weather Delay” scans and other scans that could properly be made at a delivery unit, such as “Delivered – PO Box” and “Customer (Vacation) Hold” but, rather, represent scans performed at the delivery unit that should routinely be made at the point of delivery.

Table 3. STC Scans at Delivery Unit

Scan Type	Count	Percentage
Delivery Attempted – No Access	797	54.37%
Delivered	364	24.83%
No Secure Location Available	278	18.96%
Receptacle Full/ Item Oversized	15	1.02%
No Authorized Recipient Available	8	0.55%
Delivery Exception – Animal Interference	4	0.27%
Total	1,466	100%

Source: OIG analysis of the Postal Service’s Product Tracking and Reporting (PTR) System data. PTR is the system of record for all delivery status information for mail and packages with trackable services and barcodes.

In addition, on the morning of March 14, 2023, before carriers arrived for the day, we selected 60 packages¹⁵ to review and analyze scanning and tracking history. Of the 60 sampled packages,¹⁶ 11 (18.33 percent) had missing or improper scans, including:

- Five from the “Notice Left” area were missing STC Scans to let the customer know the reason for non-delivery.
- Three (two from the carrier cases and one from the “Notice Left” area) were scanned “Delivery Attempted – No Access” but were not scanned at the delivery point.
- Two from the carrier cases were scanned “Address Unknown” but not placed in the Return to Sender area.
- One from the carrier cases was scanned “Delivered” which should only be performed when a package is successfully left at the customer’s delivery address.

Why Did It Occur

These scanning issues occurred because unit management did not adequately monitor and enforce proper scanning procedures. Specifically, management stated they routinely scanned packages “Delivery Attempted – No Access” in-office following inclement weather when carriers anticipated uncleared sidewalks and “Delivered” for customer holds. Management further explained that competing responsibilities, such as delivering unstaffed routes, prevented them from consistently reviewing integrity reports and following up with carriers.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have monitored scan performance daily and enforced compliance. The Postal Service’s goal is to ensure proper delivery attempts for mail pieces to the correct address with proper service,¹⁷ which includes scanning packages at the time and location of delivery.¹⁸

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 mail pieces correctly, customers are unable

¹⁴ 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.”

¹⁵ We judgmentally selected 30 packages from the carrier cases and 30 packages from the “Notice Left” area.

¹⁶ Eighteen of the sampled packages from the carrier cases were missing an STC scan to let the customer know the reason for non-delivery. We included these 18 packages in the delayed mail finding above because an attempt had not been made to deliver these packages.

¹⁷ *Delivery Done Right the First Time* stand-up talk, March 2020.

¹⁸ *Carriers Delivering the Customer Experience* stand-up talk, July 2017.

to determine the actual status of their packages. By improving scanning operations, management can potentially improve mail visibility, increase customer satisfaction, and enhance the customer experience and Postal Service brand.

Finding #3: Truck Arrival Scanning

What We Found

Employees at the Lewiston MPO did not scan incoming trailer/truck barcodes,¹⁹ as required. We reviewed data related to morning truck arrival scans from November 1, 2022, to January 31, 2023, and found that employees did not perform a scan for any scheduled incoming trucks (see Table 4). During our site visit we observed that employees did not scan the inbound mail trucks.

Table 4. Truck Arrival Scans from November 1, 2022 through January 31, 2023

Month	Count of Inbound Trips	Count of Missed Scans	Percentage Missing
November	44	44	100%
December	47	47	100%
January	44	44	100%
Total	135	135	100%

Source: OIG analysis of data extracted from the Postal Service's Surface Visibility Web (SVWeb) System. SVWeb 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.

Why Did It Occur

Management did not monitor scan performance data to verify that all trucks received an arrival scan because they were unaware of truck scanning procedures. The AM supervisor stated he was unaware of the scan requirement, and management stated that they had not instructed unit employees to scan.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have instructed unit employees to scan incoming trailer/truck barcodes and monitored compliance. According to Postal Service Policy,²⁰ 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.

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

When employees do not scan the truck barcode, 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.

¹⁹ The trailer barcode on the back door and inside right and left walls of the trailer.

²⁰ United States Postal Service Standard Operating Procedure - Subject: Trailer Scans at the Delivery Units (DU).

Finding #4: Arrow Keys

What We Found

Unit management did not properly manage and safeguard arrow keys. On the morning of March 16, 2023, we reviewed the unit's inventory log for arrow keys and conducted a physical inventory of keys at the unit. During our fieldwork observations, we found 79 broken arrow keys that had not been returned or maintained on the key inventory log. These keys were kept in a vault. In addition, the arrow key [REDACTED] [REDACTED] during unit operating hours and carriers retrieved their keys and signed them out on the key inventory log. We also found that carriers did not return their keys to a secure location. On the evening of March 15, 2023, we observed carriers placing keys on the [REDACTED].

Why Did It Occur

Management did not assign the proper oversight of arrow key management since the person responsible retired in 2021. Management has not reassigned arrow key responsibilities because the unit is understaffed. In addition, management stated that they were unaware of the damaged keys in the vault.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have verified that arrow key security procedures were properly followed. According to Postal Service policy,²¹ management must keep an accurate inventory of all keys and conduct a semiannual physical survey of all building keys. Broken arrow keys must be maintained on the key inventory log until returned to the vendor. In addition, policy²² states a supervisor or clerk must supervise employees signing out keys on the inventory log. Upon return, arrow keys should be deposited in a secure location and a supervisor or clerk must verify all keys have been returned and accounted for daily.

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

When there is insufficient oversight and supervision of accountable items such as arrow keys, there is increased risk of mail theft. These thefts damage the Postal Service's reputation and diminish public trust in the nation's mail system. Additionally, because arrow keys open mail receptacles, lost or damaged keys can result in undelivered mail.

²¹ *Administrative Support Manual* Issue 13, Sections 273.461, 273.464, and 273.471, July 1999 – updated through February 28, 2023 and *USPS Arrow Key Standard Work*, January 2022.

²² *Standard Work: Arrow Key Accountability*, January 2022 and *USPS Arrow Key Standard Work*, January 2022.

Finding #5: Property Conditions

What We Found

We found safety and maintenance issues at the Lewiston MPO including:

- Missing monthly and annual inspections on all fire extinguishers.
- A broken toilet in the men's restroom.
- Peeling paint throughout the facility (see Figure 3).
- Stained and missing ceiling tiles (see Figure 4).

Figure 3. Examples of Peeling Paint

Lobby Hallway



Workroom



Source: OIG photos taken on March 15, 2023.

Figure 4. Example of Stained and Missing Ceiling Tiles



Source: OIG photo taken on March 15, 2023.

Why Did It Occur

Management did not take the necessary actions to verify that facility conditions issues were corrected because they prioritized staffing issues above safety and maintenance issues. Further, management stated they were unaware of who to contact to follow-up on the status of reported issues.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have provided sufficient oversight of personnel responsible for maintaining facilities, reported safety and maintenance issues as they arose, and followed up for completion. 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.²³

²³ OSHA Act of 1970 and Handbook EL-801, *Supervisor's Safety Handbook*.

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

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's Comments

Management agreed with all findings in the report.

See [Appendix B](#) for management's comments in their entirety.

Appendix A: Additional Information

We conducted this audit from March through May 2023 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 assessed the reliability of PTR, DCV, SVWeb, and electronic Facilities Management System²⁴ data by reviewing existing information, comparing data from other sources, observing operations, and interviewing Postal Service officials knowledgeable about the data. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

²⁴ 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



May 4, 2023

JOHN CIHOTA
DIRECTOR, AUDIT SERVICES

SUBJECT: Management Response: Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions
Review – Lewiston Main Post Office, Lewiston, ME (Report Number 23-076-2-
DRAFT)

Thank you for providing the Postal Service an opportunity to review and comment on the findings contained in the draft audit report, *Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review – Lewiston Main Post Office, Lewiston, ME*.

Management agrees with the five findings in the report on delayed mail, package scanning, truck arrival scanning, arrow keys, and property conditions.

Management has begun taking steps to address the five findings.

Delayed Mail: Management will retrain local EAS on the Standard Work for properly reporting delayed mail in DCV. Management continues to pursue recruitment activities in the Southern Maine area and post career opportunities weekly until all vacancies are filled.

Package Scanning: Personnel will be retrained on the proper way to scan parcels for non-delivery due to No Access, Weather Delays, and Integrity Scans. The Standard Work for proper scanning due to Weather Delays or No Access is communicated on a regular basis and always in advance of an expected weather event.

Truck Arrival Scanning: Management will retrain personnel on the proper way to scan Truck Arrivals. The Standard Work instructions has also been sent out to all offices and reminders will be sent weekly.

Arrow Keys: The office will be retrained on Standard Work and operating procedures for Arrow Key Management including updating key logs, reporting missing arrow keys to the USPS Inspection Service, returning any broken arrow keys to Topeka, and ensuring arrow keys are verified and secured daily. Recent Gemba's were completed and office in full compliance.

Property Conditions: Three of the five property conditions have been abated. Work orders have been submitted for the remaining two.

E-SIGNED by Regina.M Bugbee
on 2023-05-04 11:01:43 CDT

Regina M. Bugbee
Manager, Northern New England District

cc: Vice President, Area Retail & Delivery Operations (Atlantic)
Manager, Corporate Audit Response Management

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