Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review – Sanford Main Post Office, Sanford, ME

AUDIT REPORT
Report Number 23-076-4-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

[signature: Sean Balduff]

FROM:	Sean Balduff Director, Field Operations
SUBJECT:	Audit Report – Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review – Sanford Main Post Office, Sanford, ME (Report Number 23-076-4-R23)

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

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies provided by your staff. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Monica Brym, 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

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Results

Background

This interim report presents the results of our self-initiated audit of mail delivery, customer service, and property conditions at the Sanford Main Post Office in Sanford, ME (Project Number 23-076-4) and responds to Representative Chellie Pingree's interest in mail operations in the Portland, ME, area. The Sanford Main Post Office is in the Maine–New Hampshire–Vermont District of the Atlantic Area and services ZIP Codes 04002, 04027, 04073, and 04083. These ZIP Codes serve about 34,174 people in a predominantly rural area.[1] This delivery unit has 11 rural routes, 12 city routes, and one highway contract route.[2] We judgmentally selected the Sanford Main Post Office based on the number of Customer 360[3] and Informed Delivery[4] contacts associated with the unit, undelivered route information, and Stop-The-Clock (STC)[5] scans performed at the unit.

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

Our objective was to evaluate mail delivery, customer service, and property conditions at the Sanford Main Post Office in Sanford, ME.

To accomplish our objective, we focused on five audit areas: delayed mail, package scanning, truck arrival scans, arrow keys,[6] 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.[7] 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" area,[8] 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 Sanford Main Post Office is one of five delivery units[9] 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 (P&DC). We are issuing this interim report to provide the Postal Service with timely information regarding conditions we identified at the Sanford Main Post Office. We will issue a separate report[10] 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 Sanford Main Post Office. Specifically, we found issues with all five of the 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.

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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 these ZIP Codes, about 20,265 (59.30 percent) are considered living in rural communities and about 13,909 (40.70 percent) are considered living in urban communities.

2   A contractual agreement between USPS and an individual or company for the delivery and collection of mail to individual customers.

3   A cloud-based application that enables Postal Service employees to diagnose, resolve, and track customer inquiries.

4   Informed Delivery is a free and optional notification service that gives residential customers the ability to digitally preview their letter-sized mail and submit inquiries for mail pieces that were expected for delivery but have not arrived.

5   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."

6   A distinctively shaped key that 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.

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

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

9   The other four units were Industrial Park Annex, Saco, ME (Project Number 23-076-1); Lewiston Main Post Office, Lewiston, ME (Project Number 23-076-2); Main Office Carrier Section, Portland, ME (Project Number 23-076-3) and Southern Maine Carrier Unit, Scarborough, ME (Project Number 23-076-5).

10 Project Number 23-076.

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Finding #1: Delayed Mail

What We Found

On the morning of March 14, 2023, we identified about 4,181 delayed mail pieces at 12 carrier cases and on the workroom floor.[11] Specifically, we identified 1,849 letters, 1,050 flats, and 1,282 packages (see Table 2). We found undelivered mail dating back to March 11, 2023. In addition, management did not report this mail as undelivered in the Delivery Condition Visualization (DCV)[12] system. See Figure 1 for examples of delayed mail found at carrier cases and Figure 2 for examples of delayed packages on the workroom floor.

In addition, we identified 368 pieces of delayed collection mail[13] that were not dispatched to the Southern Maine P&DC for processing on the previous night. The carriers brought the mail pieces to the unit on Monday, March 13, 2023, after the final truck dispatched to the P&DC. Further, we observed this mail at the unit on the following Tuesday morning after two trucks had been dispatched to the P&DC. We alerted the supervisor around 7 a.m., and he placed the delayed collection mail on the 7:30 a.m. truck. See Figure 3 for examples of delayed collection mail.

Figure 1. Example of Delayed Mail at Carrier Case

Source: OIG photo taken on March 14, 2023.

Table 2. Type of Delayed Mail

Type of Mail	Carrier Cases	Workroom Floor	Collection Mail	Total OIG Estimated Count of Delayed Mail
Letters	1,515		334	1,849
Flats	1,049		1	1,050
Packages	12	1,237	33	1,282
Total	**2,576**	**1,237**	**368**	**4,181**

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

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11   Count of mail included individual piece counts and OIG estimate based on Postal Service conversion factors in Handbook M-32, Management Operating Data Systems, Appendix D, and Management Instruction PO-610-2007-1, Piece Count Recording System.

12   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.

13   Mail deposited into a collection box or lobby drop, as well as mail collected by carriers on their delivery rounds.

Figure 2. Delayed Packages on the Workroom Floor

Source: OIG photos taken on March 14, 2023.

Figure 3. Delayed Collection Mail

Source: OIG photo taken on March 14, 2023.

Why Did It Occur

Unit management did not provide proper oversight to verify that all mail was cleared from the unit and taken to the street for delivery. The AM Supervisor stated that he did not expect any delayed mail because the unit was fully staffed on Monday, March 13, 2023. However, he further stated that he did not perform a thorough walk-through of the carrier cases and workroom area after carriers departed for their routes. In addition, the PM supervisor stated she did not know how to report undelivered mail in the DCV system.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have verified that all mail was processed and delivered daily. Postal Service policy[14] 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 required[15] 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 DCV 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.

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14 *Committed Mail & Color Code Policy for Marketing Mail* stand-up talk, February 2019.
15 *Informed Visibility Delivery Condition Visualization User Guide*, September 2022.

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Finding #2: Package Scanning

What We Found

Employees improperly scanned packages at the delivery unit. In total, employees scanned 883 packages at the delivery unit between November 2022 and January 2023 (see Table 3). Further analysis of the STC scan data for these packages showed that 46.43 percent of them were scanned "No Secure Location Available." This data excludes 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

STC Scan Type	Count	Percentage
No Secure Location Available	410	46.43%
Delivery Attempted – No Access to Delivery Location	152	17.21%
Delivered	129	14.61%
Receptacle Full / Item Oversized	127	14.38%
Delivery Exception – Local Weather Delay	57	6.46%
No Authorized Recipient Available	6	0.68%
Delivery Exception – Animal Interference	2	0.23%
Total	**883**	**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 37 packages[16] to review and analyze for scanning and tracking history. Two packages located in the "Notice Left" area were improperly scanned "No Secure Location Available" at the unit, rather than the delivery address.[17] Further, one package in the "Notice Left" area was not returned to the sender, as required.[18] This package was 38 days past its return date.

Why Did It Occur

These scanning issues occurred because unit management did not adequately monitor and enforce proper package scanning and handling procedures. The AM supervisor stated that although he monitors and discusses scan performance with employees, he did not strictly enforce scanning procedures. In addition, the PM supervisor stated that she did not review the package tracking tool because she is new to the position and has been more focused on supervising delivery of the mail.

For the 410 packages scanned "No Secure Location Available" at the unit, employees said they scanned them at the unit due to unsafe driving conditions. When there is bad weather, employees scan packages at the unit, instead of taking up space in the delivery vehicle for packages they will be unable to deliver and must bring back to the unit. The postmaster acknowledged employees should have scanned packages "Delivery Attempted – No Access to Delivery Location" at the delivery point.

In addition, the package in the "Notice Left" area was not returned due to inadequate management oversight. Specifically, the AM supervisor stated that no one was assigned to review packages in the "Notice Left" area.

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,[19] which includes scanning packages at the time and location of delivery.[20] 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.

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16   We selected all 26 packages from the carrier cases and all 11 packages from the "Notice Left" area.
17   Four of the selected packages from the carrier cases were missing an STC scan to let the customer know the reason for non-delivery because an attempt had not been made to deliver these packages. We included these four packages in the delayed mail finding above.
18   *Notice Left and Return Guidelines*, dated July 2007, 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.
19   *Delivery Done Right the First Time* stand-up talk, March 2020.
20   *Carriers Delivering the Customer Experience* stand-up talk, July 2017.

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 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 the Postal Service brand.

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Finding #3: Truck Arrival Scanning

What We Found

Employees at the Sanford Main Post Office did not scan incoming trailer/truck barcodes,[21] 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 of the 287 scheduled incoming trucks (see Table 4). During our observations on the morning of March 14, 2023, we observed that employees were not scanning the incoming mail trucks from the Southern Maine P&DC.

Why Did It Occur

Unit management was not aware of the policy to scan trailer/truck barcodes on incoming trucks arriving at the delivery unit, and therefore, did not monitor scan performance data to verify that trucks received an arrival scan.

What Should Have Happened

Unit management should have instructed employees to perform the scans and enforced the requirement. According to Postal Service Policy,[22] 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.

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	93	93	100%
December	101	101	100%
January	93	93	100%
Total	**287**	**287**	**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.

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21 The trailer barcode on the back door and inside right and left walls of the trailer.
22 *United States Postal Service Standard Operating Procedure – Subject: Trailer Scans at the Delivery Units (DUs).*

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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. We found 10 of the 44 keys located at the unit were not listed on the inventory log. Seven of these keys were damaged and had not been returned to the vendor. These keys were kept separately in a ███████████ in the ████. In addition, management could not locate two keys listed on the inventory log. Management had not reported these two keys as missing to the U.S. Postal Inspection Service.

In addition, arrow keys were not always kept secure. Throughout our site visit, we observed the ████ containing the keys was left in the ████████ ████████ during the workday, and some carriers took their keys without signing them out. In addition, on the evening of March 15, 2023, we observed the ███████████████ A window clerk occasionally came out to the ███████████ and visually checked that carriers returned their arrow keys to the appropriate slot. We also found one key inside an unlocked ████ in the ███████ ████. This ████ was normally left unlocked and unoccupied.

Why Did It Occur

Unit management did not properly manage and safeguard arrow keys because they prioritized other duties, such as scheduling staff and getting mail delivered. The AM supervisor acknowledged that the ████ that contained arrow keys should be secured at all times. He further stated that he was unaware of any missing keys or the return procedures for damaged keys.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have verified that arrow key accountability and security procedures were properly followed. According to Postal Service policy,[23] management must keep an accurate inventory of all keys and conduct a semiannual physical survey of all building keys. In addition, policy[24] states that missing arrow keys must be immediately reported to the U.S.

Postal Inspection Service and broken arrow keys must be maintained on the key inventory log until returned to the vendor. Arrow keys must remain secured until they are individually assigned to personnel. 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.

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23 *Administrative Support Manual* Issue 13, Sections 273.461, 273.464, and 273.471, July 1999 - updated through February 28, 2023.
24 *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 security issues at the Sanford Main Post Office, including nine fire extinguishers that were missing inspections. For four of the extinguishers, the last monthly inspection was done March 1, 2019, and the last annual inspection was done in August 2020. The other five fire extinguishers were missing inspection tags altogether. We also identified a blocked inspection service door (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Blocked Inspection Service Door
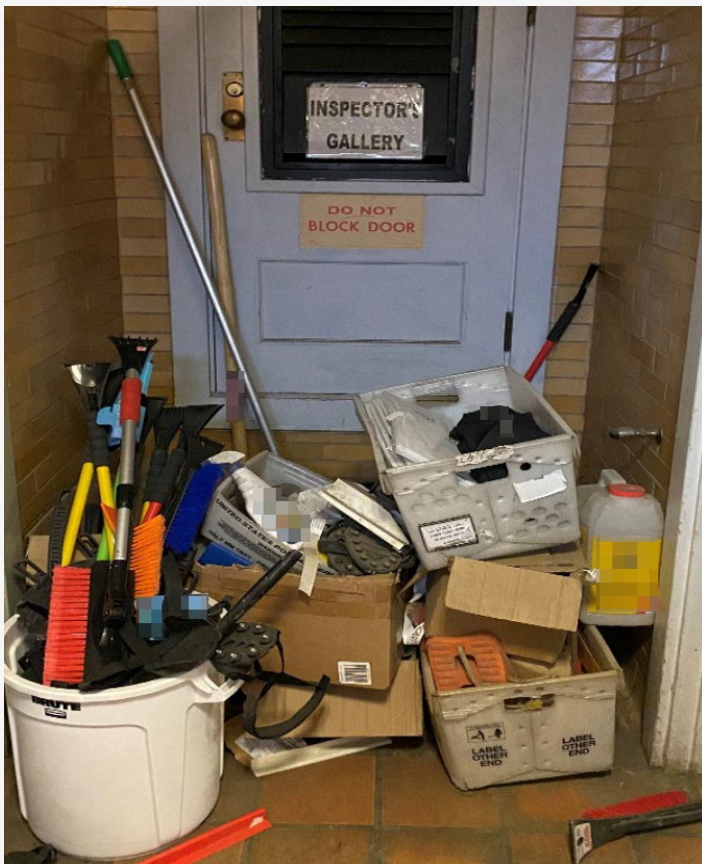
Source: OIG photo taken on March 15, 2023

Why Did It Occur

Management did not take the necessary actions to verify that facility conditions issues were corrected. Management stated that they were unaware of these issues and thought the fire extinguishers were all new.

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.[25]

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

Management's attention to maintenance, safety, and security 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 the Postal Service brand.

Management's Comments

Management agreed with all findings in the report.

See Appendix B for management's comments in their entirety.

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

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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, and SVWeb 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.

Appendix B: Management's Comments

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

May 4, 2023

JOHN CIHOTA
DIRECTOR, AUDIT SERVICES

SUBJECT: Management Response: Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review – Sanford Main Post Office, Sanford, ME (Report Number 23-076-4-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 – Sanford Main Post Office, Sanford, 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. Additionally, management will retrain personnel on proper handling of collection mail and dispatch procedures. 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: The two property conditions identified have been fixed.

E-SIGNED by Regina M Bugbee
on 2023-05-04 11:02:00 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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1735 North Lynn Street, Arlington, VA 22209-2020
(703) 248-2100

For media inquiries, please email press@uspsoig.gov or call (703) 248-2100

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