

USPS Emergency Preparedness: Hurricane Ian

AUDIT REPORT

Report Number 24-041-R24 | May 29, 2024



Table of Contents

Cover

Highlights..... 1

Background 1

What We Did 1

What We Found 1

Recommendations 1

Transmittal Letter..... 2

Results..... 3

Introduction/Objective..... 3

Background 3

Findings Summary 5

Finding #1: Preparedness Efforts at Everglades City Post Office .. 6

Recommendation #1 6

Recommendation #2 6

Postal Service Response..... 7

OIG Evaluation 7

Finding #2: Recovery Efforts for the Everglades City Post Office 8

Restoring Internet and Phone Service..... 8

Restoring Retail Services..... 9

Recommendation #3 10

Recommendation #4..... 10

Postal Service Response..... 10

OIG Evaluation 10

Appendices..... 11

Appendix A: Additional Information..... 12

Scope and Methodology 12

Prior Audit Coverage 13

Appendix B: Management's Comments 14

Contact Information 17

Highlights

Background

The U.S. Postal Service has an obligation to ensure a minimum level of universal service, including mail delivery at least six days a week to nearly 167 million residences, businesses, and Post Office (PO) Boxes. During natural disasters — such as Hurricane Ian, which made landfall on Florida’s Gulf Coast on September 28, 2022 — the Postal Service may choose to suspend operations; however, the management of recovery efforts to return to normal mail operations is imperative.

What We Did

This report responds to a congressional inquiry. Our objective was to evaluate the Postal Service’s planning and recovery efforts before and after Hurricane Ian in Everglades City, FL. We interviewed supervisors, managers, and officials involved in the emergency event, and reviewed internal policies and procedures around weather emergencies. We also visited the Everglades City Post Office, referenced in the congressional inquiry, to assess management’s actions related Hurricane Ian.

What We Found

The Postal Service did not safeguard the mail, retail products, PO Box records, or equipment at the Everglades City Post Office prior to Hurricane Ian’s landfall in accordance with Postal Service guidance. Additionally, Florida 2 District management did not effectively manage the recovery efforts to restore retail services after the effects of the storm. As a result, the Everglades City Post Office has lost almost \$66,000 of retail postage revenue since Hurricane Ian.

Recommendations and Management’s Comments

We recommended management develop a procedure to document and confirm that hurricane preparedness tasks are completed before a storm, update hurricane preparedness guidance to implement all possible mitigation factors to reduce storm damage, create a communication process for the timely recovery of postal retail operations, and develop a plan with actionable milestones to restore internet and phone service to the Everglades City Post Office. Management agreed with three of four recommendations and the Office of Inspector General (OIG) considers management’s comments responsive, as corrective actions should resolve the issues identified in the report. The Postal Service’s comments and our evaluation are at the end of each finding and recommendation. See [Appendix B](#) for management’s comments in their entirety.

Transmittal Letter



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

May 29, 2024

MEMORANDUM FOR: JUDY A. DE TOROK
VICE PRESIDENT, CORPORATE AFFAIRS

LINDA K. CRAWFORD
VICE PRESIDENT, RETAIL & DELIVERY OPERATIONS,
SOUTHERN AREA

WILLIAM E. KOETZ
VICE PRESIDENT, NETWORK AND COMPUTE TECHNOLOGY

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "W Espinoza", is positioned above the "FROM:" field.

FROM: Wilvia Espinoza
Deputy Assistant Inspector General
For Inspection Service, Technology, and Services

SUBJECT: Audit Report – U.S. Postal Service Emergency Preparedness:
Hurricane Ian (Report Number 24-041-R24)

This report presents the results of our audit of the U.S. Postal Service Emergency Preparedness of Hurricane Ian.

All recommendations require U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) concurrence before closure. Consequently, the OIG requests written confirmation when corrective actions are completed. Recommendations 1 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. See [Appendix B](#) for management's comments in their entirety.

We consider recommendations 2 and 4 closed with the issuance of this report.

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies provided by your staff. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Victoria Dixon, Director, Inspection Service, or me at 703-248-2100.

Attachment

cc: Postmaster General
Corporate Audit Response Management

Results

Introduction/Objective

This report relates to a congressional inquiry regarding the U.S. Postal Service’s preparedness and response actions to Hurricane Ian at the Everglades City, FL, Post Office (Project Number 24-041). Our objective was to evaluate the Postal Service’s planning and recovery efforts for Hurricane Ian in Everglades City, FL. See [Appendix A](#) for additional information about this audit.

Background

Postal Service Emergency Preparedness

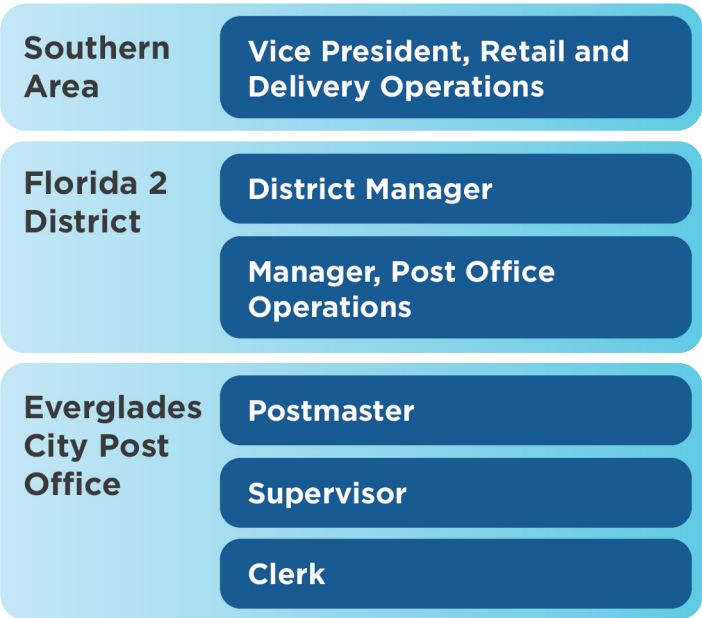
The Postal Service has an obligation to ensure a minimum level of universal service, including mail delivery at least six days a week to nearly 167 million residences, businesses, and Post Office (PO) Boxes. During natural disasters, it is the policy¹ of the Postal Service to quickly respond to and recover from an emergency or threat to the mail infrastructure. While the Postal Service may suspend normal operations during weather emergencies, such as hurricanes, its ability to timely restore services after these events is critical to meet this obligation. Americans continue to rely on mail service for receiving medications, Social Security checks, and other essentials. Therefore, Postal Service’s management of recovery efforts to return to normal mail operations is imperative. The Postal Service must have a continuity plan in place to ensure continued performance of the Postal Service’s primary mission – delivery of postal services to the American public.

The Postal Service’s Office of National Preparedness issues national preparedness guidance, such as the Hurricane Preparedness Guide, for the Postal Service to respond to emergencies that disrupt operations. Specifically, the guide contains checklists that detail actionable items to minimize damage and loss of assets and enable the continuation of essential Postal Service functions and critical services.

Everglades City Post Office Normal Operations

The Everglades City Post Office is a remotely managed² office in the Florida 2 District³ that provides postal services to three communities: Everglades City, Chokoloskee, and Copeland. The postmaster is based out of Marco Island and, with the assistance of a supervisor, manages several post offices, including Marco Island and Everglades City. The Everglades City Post Office has two clerks on site, providing PO Box and retail services to over 1,390 customers and businesses.⁴ See Figure 1 for the reporting structure for district and local management.

Figure 1. Organizational Reporting Structure for the Everglades City Post Office



Source: U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) analysis.

Under normal operations, the Everglades City Post Office is equipped to provide retail services, such as postage and money orders, to its customers. In addition, the facility provides free PO Box services⁵ to the residents of the communities it serves. The residents are required to pick up their mail because

¹ Management Instruction AS-280-2021-7, *Integrated Emergency Management Supporting Field Business Continuity*, November 2021.
² A remotely managed post office does not have a postmaster or supervisor physically on site.
³ Postal Service Retail and Delivery district covering postal facilities in Central and Southwest Florida.
⁴ Everglades City had 568 PO Boxes; Chokoloskee had 774 PO Boxes; and Copeland had 52 PO Boxes according to the 2023 PO Box Annual Audit Reviews.
⁵ Customers may qualify for Group E (free) PO Box service at a post office if the Postal Service does not provide carrier delivery to their physical addresses.

this post office does not provide carrier delivery services. Having an assigned PO Box allows the residents to pick up their mail and packages from the facility 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Hurricane Ian

Hurricane Ian, one of the most powerful storms ever to hit the U.S., made landfall on Florida's Gulf Coast on September 28, 2022.⁶ In anticipation of the Category 4⁷ hurricane, the Postal Service suspended delivery and retail operations at 215 post offices across Central and Southwest Florida, including Everglades City. In the hurricane's immediate aftermath, Everglades City was one of 13 Southwest Florida locations where postal services were relocated due to severe damages. In the Everglades City Post Office, flood water levels reached approximately seven to eight feet above floor level. See Figure 2 for the condition of Everglades City Post Office's parking lot the day after Hurricane Ian.

Due to the level of destruction, the Postal Service directed customers normally served by the

Everglades City Post Office to pick up their mail and obtain retail services 30 miles away at the Marco Island Post Office. In response to customer inquiries, the Postal Service deployed mobile retail units⁸ to the Everglades City parking lot on October 5, 2022, to continue operations locally, as shown in Figure 3.

A news article reported that, as of June 2023, the Postal Service had not fully restored operations at the Everglades City Post Office and continued providing mail pickup services in the mobile retail units in its parking lot.⁹ While the mobile retail units provided mail retrieval services, the postmaster stated they did not provide retail services to customers due to lack of internet service. The Everglades City Post Office did not reopen until September 12, 2023, nearly one year after the Postal Service announced a temporary suspension of services for this facility. As of April 4, 2024, more than 18 months after the hurricane, the facility had not been restored to a full-service post office.

Figure 2. Everglades City Parking Lot One Day After Hurricane Ian



Source: Postal Service, September 29, 2022.

⁶ National Public Radio (www.npr.org), *Hurricane Ian makes landfall in Florida with catastrophic strength: Live updates*, September 28, 2022.

⁷ Winds ranging from 130 to 156 miles per hour.

⁸ Postal mobile vehicles are set up in post office parking lots to service customers when a facility is closed from weather damage.

⁹ Naples Daily News, *Hurricane Ian closed 5 SW Florida post offices. When will they reopen?* June 13, 2023.

Figure 3. Mobile Retail Units at the Everglades City Parking Lot



Source: Picture taken by Everglades City Mayor's Office staff on May 3, 2023.

In June 2023, the OIG received a congressional inquiry to address concerns related to the Postal Service's preparedness and response actions to Hurricane Ian at the Everglades City, FL, Post Office. The inquiry expressed concerns regarding the timely restoration

of operations of the city's only post office. While other Postal Service facilities in Central and Southwest Florida were impacted by Hurricane Ian, we focused our fieldwork on the Everglades City Post Office, as it was specifically identified in the congressional inquiry.

Findings Summary

The Postal Service's planning and recovery efforts for Hurricane Ian in Everglades City, FL, did not ensure timely restoration of normal mail and retail operations at the Everglades City Post Office. Specifically, the mail, retail products, PO Box records, and equipment were not safeguarded prior to landfall of Hurricane Ian. Additionally, the internet and phone service needed for the network connectivity to conduct Postal Service operations had not been restored to the post office as of April 4, 2024.

Finding #1: Preparedness Efforts at Everglades City Post Office

The Everglades City postmaster did not safeguard the mail, retail products, PO Box records, or equipment prior to landfall of Hurricane Ian, in accordance with Postal Service guidance. Specifically, post office management did not move all mail, money orders, and stamp stock¹⁰ to a higher elevation or cover with tarps or plastic to protect them from floodwaters. Additionally, management did not cover or secure the unit's electronic equipment,¹¹ file cabinets, and PO Boxes. Lastly, management did not use all measures to mitigate the effects of the flood damage.

“Postal Service management did not ensure hurricane preparedness procedures were followed.”

The Everglades City Post Office is located in a flood zone, which makes it more susceptible to flooding; therefore, management should take extra precautions to mitigate the risk of significant flood damage from

hurricanes or other potential natural disasters. Postal Service guidance¹² states that all mail including PO Box mail, stamp stock, and money orders must be elevated at least three feet off the floor. Additionally, all electronic equipment must be covered with plastic. Also, all non-stationary items, such as file cabinets containing PO Box records and PO Boxes must be removed or secured. Lastly, the guidance states the district management should consider all possible supplies available to reduce the effects of flooding. According to best practices from the Federal Emergency Management Agency,¹³ locations expecting a storm surge¹⁴ should remove or elevate property to prevent or reduce flood damage.

The Everglades City Post Office was not prepared for Hurricane Ian because Postal Service management did not ensure hurricane preparedness procedures were followed. Specifically, the postmaster and supervisor who manage staff and operations at the Everglades City Post Office were not physically located at the post office and relied on the employees onsite to perform the tasks detailed on the pre-landfall checklists. However, they did not recall providing instructions to the clerks onsite and did not confirm the tasks were completed.

The lack of management oversight necessary to ensure the Everglades City Post Office was safeguarded during the hurricane led to significant damage caused by floodwaters inside the building, which resulted in lost customer mail and PO Box records. Additionally, stamp stock and money orders were irreparably damaged and had to be destroyed.¹⁵ Further, electronic equipment, file cabinets, and PO Boxes had to be replaced, which also contributed to delays in making postal services operational again after the hurricane.

Recommendation #1

We recommend the **Vice President, Retail and Delivery Operations, Southern Area**, direct the District Manager, Florida 2 to develop a procedure to document and confirm that hurricane preparedness tasks are completed before a storm.

Recommendation #2

We recommend the **Vice President, Corporate Affairs**, update hurricane preparedness guidance to include the clarification of appropriate mitigation measures, such as removing or elevating assets to a level necessary to reduce the risk of flood damage to customers' mail, postal products, and property.

¹⁰ Stamp stock includes stamps, stamped envelopes, and cards.

¹¹ Electronic equipment includes the postage meter, scale, money order machine, and scanner.

¹² *Hurricane Preparedness Guide*, Facility / District / Area / HQ, Section 7-5 36-Hour Pre-Landfall and Potential Evaluation Checklist, May 2022.

¹³ *Protect Your Property From Storm Surge*, Federal Emergency Management Agency, April 28, 2023.

¹⁴ The abnormal rise in seawater level during a storm, caused by the wind pushing water onshore.

¹⁵ The stamp stock and money orders were destroyed because they were damaged by floodwaters and considered contaminated.

Postal Service Response

The Postal Service agreed with this finding, along with recommendations 1 and 2. Management provided a target implementation date of July 31, 2024 for recommendation 1. They also provided documentation to close recommendation 2 with the issuance of this report.

OIG Evaluation

Based on management's plans to document preparedness efforts and with their update of the Hurricane Preparedness Guide, we consider management's comments responsive to recommendations 1 and 2, and corrective actions should resolve the issues identified in the report. We consider recommendation 2 closed with the issuance of this report.

Finding #2: Recovery Efforts for the Everglades City Post Office

Florida 2 district management did not effectively manage the recovery efforts at the Everglades City Post Office after the effects of Hurricane Ian. Specifically, the internet and phone service needed for the network connectivity to conduct Postal Service operations was not restored to the post office. Additionally, although the post office provided partial retail counter services to customers, such as mail pick-up and mail drop-off with pre-paid postage, customers could not purchase stamps or money orders.

Restoring Internet and Phone Service

The Everglades City Post Office did not have internet and phone service for the network connectivity to run the equipment needed to sell stamps and money orders or process PO Box payments after Hurricane Ian. Specifically, the network connectivity lines damaged during Hurricane Ian had not been repaired or replaced as of April 4, 2024.

Postal Service guidance¹⁶ states district and area management must be prepared to coordinate requests for information technology (IT) support when emergency computer and telecommunications are needed at postal facilities for the continuity of operations. Additionally, during an emergency or other situation that may disrupt normal operations, the Postal Service must exercise its continuity capability and ensure continued delivery of postal services to the American public.

This issue occurred because there was a lack of communication between the local, district, and headquarters management to verify services were restored. Specifically, the Everglades City supervisor submitted an IT helpdesk ticket on October 27, 2022,

to have phone and internet service restored. However, it was more than a year later, on Dec 13, 2023,¹⁷ that the helpdesk finally provided a cellular broadband router¹⁸ as a temporary solution. According to postal management, the router connectivity was inconsistent and impacts the ability to run the retail equipment. The helpdesk claimed they were unaware of the issues with the router and were unaware that the building did not have network connectivity even though at least six helpdesk tickets were submitted by local management. During our interview on February 20, 2024, IT support staff stated they were unaware the building did not have network connectivity and confirmed the internet and phone services at the post office were still offline. IT support staff sent a second router and stated the internet was restored on March 7, 2024. However, the postmaster stated the router connectivity continued to be inconsistent until they received and installed a third router on April 12, 2024.

“There was a lack of communication between the local, district, and headquarters management to verify services were restored.”

Additionally, district management did not monitor to ensure phone services were restored. Specifically, as late as January 29, 2024, when we spoke to the Florida 2 District Manager located in Tampa, FL, they stated that phone services were restored. However, we confirmed that phone services were still down during our site visit on January 31, 2024. Although the Everglades City supervisor

repeatedly attempted to escalate to district management and request IT support, Everglades City continued to report router connectivity issues for over six months after reopening; network connectivity was not restored until April 12, 2024.

Further, IT support had been unable to resolve the helpdesk ticket because it could not find a local

¹⁶ Hurricane Preparedness Guide, Sections 3-3, 4-3, and 5-3, dated May 2022.

¹⁷ The Everglades City Post Office did not reopen the building until September 12, 2023.

¹⁸ A network device that allows cellular internet access and would have allowed the post office to sell retail products and services and register customer PO Box information.

internet service provider to repair the lines and provide service needed for network connectivity. According to IT Endpoint Technology personnel,¹⁹ the vendor that provided these services to the Everglades City Post Office before Hurricane Ian refused to repair the lines. As a result, the Postal Service Headquarters Supply Management group terminated the contract with the service provider and solicited a new vendor to repair the lines. As of April 2024, the Postal Service was still looking for a local service provider to repair the lines to the building to restore internet and phone service.

Restoring Retail Services

District and local management did not ensure the Everglades City Post Office had the retail equipment²⁰ needed, such as a scale to weigh mail or packages, or experienced clerks to sell stamps, postage, and money orders when the building reopened on September 12, 2023. Additionally, although the Everglades City Post Office collected cash and check payments for PO Box fees and key deposits from customers, the employees relied on the clerks at the Goodland, FL, Post Office to enter customers' PO Box payment information into the PO Box tracking system and manually deposit the cash and checks received on their behalf.

The Postal Service's contingency plan for field retail operations²¹ provides guidance for post offices using the retail systems software but also provides practical instructions to resume retail operations manually.²² Specifically, the guidance provides a limited scope of services to minimize customer service impact when automated functions become unavailable. The guidance could be applied to the Everglades City Post Office, specifically for processing customer payments and receipts, mailing and shipping, selling stamps, and cashing money orders. The guidance states that the district manager has the authority to implement this contingency plan.

The Everglades City postmaster stated he was not aware of the field retail operations contingency plan because it applies to post offices that use

“As of February 14, 2024, the post office began offering stamps for sale to customers by cash and check for the first time since the hurricane hit in September 2022.”

retail systems software, and Everglades City is a manual post office. Additionally, the postmaster stated he did not request retail equipment from Postal Service Headquarters until three months after reopening because his priority was providing mail pick-up services to customers. Although the post office received the postage meter and money order machine, the scale and payment device were no longer available or on back order as of January 2024. Further, the postmaster stated the clerk previously assigned to the office retired and therefore, they did not have an experienced clerk familiar with the retail equipment or the manual process to sell retail products or postage to customers. In March 2023, the postmaster assigned a clerk to the Everglades City Post Office, but stated they were not experienced in the processes of a manual office.²³ Lastly, although the post office accepted cash and checks for PO Box payments, the postmaster stated he did not consider the option to manually sell stamps because they were more focused on getting customers their mail. As of February 14, 2024, the post office began offering stamps for sale to customers by cash and check for the first time since the hurricane hit in September 2022. Since action was taken on the clerk position and resumption of selling stamps, we are not making recommendations to further address those issues.

¹⁹ IT Endpoint Technology provides technical support for internet and phone restoration.

²⁰ Retail equipment includes printers, postage meters and scales, and money order imprinters.

²¹ *Retail Systems Software (RSS) Contingency Plan*, December 2022.

²² Post offices that do not use the retail systems software are classified as a non-RSS or manual office.

²³ In February 2024, the Everglades City supervisor confirmed they are in the process of training the new clerk in manual retail operations.

Coordination is needed across all levels of Postal Service management to ensure resources and staff are available to provide the needed postal services to customers. Additionally, due to management's lack of coordination to restore network connectivity, the Everglades City Post Office was unable to provide customers with full PO Box and retail services for 18 months since Hurricane Ian made landfall. Lastly, because the postmaster chose not to manually sell stamps, we calculated an unrecoverable revenue loss,²⁴ based on our projections of retail postage revenue prior to the hurricane,²⁵ of \$65,538 from October 1, 2022 through February 29, 2024.

Recommendation #3

We recommend the **Vice President, Retail and Delivery Operations, Southern Area**, 1) develop and implement a communication process to verify the timely recovery of postal retail services after weather or other emergencies, and 2) adopt a contingency plan to resume retail operations manually when automated functions become unavailable.

Recommendation #4

We recommend the **Vice President, Network and Compute Technology** develop a plan, with actionable milestones, to restore internet and phone service to the Everglades City Post Office.

Postal Service Response

The Postal Service disagreed with this finding and the associated monetary impact. Regarding the finding, management stated the Florida 2 District made multiple attempts to order the necessary retail equipment and restoring internet and phone service was out of their control. Additionally, for the monetary impact, management stated that although there was

a revenue loss, there was an increase in revenue at an office less than 10 miles from Everglades City.

Management disagreed with recommendation 3 and stated a communication plan would help to verify the timely recovery of postal retail services. However, a contingency plan to resume manual operations already existed.

Management agreed with recommendation 4 and provided documentation to close the recommendation with the issuance of this report.

OIG Evaluation

Regarding management's disagreement with the finding, we reported that the helpdesk provided a router to the Everglades City Post Office over a year later than initially requested. Further, after subsequent attempts to restore internet and phone services, it was not until after the OIG audit team interviewed IT support staff on February 20, 2024, that they discovered connectivity was not restored.

Regarding the monetary impact, we calculated this amount based on prior retail postage revenue at Everglades City Post Office, as it is not possible to definitively calculate the effect of the increased postage revenue at other locations.

Regarding recommendation 3, although management stated a contingency plan for manual offices existed, this plan was not provided to the OIG and the Everglades City postmaster was not aware of the field retail operations contingency plan to resume postal retail services. We view management's disagreement with recommendation 3 as unresolved and will work with management through the formal audit resolution process.

Management's comments were responsive to recommendation 4 and we consider this recommendation closed with the issuance of this report.

²⁴ Revenue loss applies to funds such as postage, retail sales, rent leases, or fees the Postal Service is entitled to receive but was underpaid or not realized because policies, procedures, agreements, or requirements were lacking or not followed.

²⁵ We reviewed financial performance data for FYs 2021 and 2022 to determine the amount of retail postage revenue the Everglades City Post Office earned in the two years prior to Hurricane Ian.

Appendices

Appendix A: Additional Information.....	12
Scope and Methodology	12
Prior Audit Coverage	13
Appendix B: Management's Comments	14

Appendix A: Additional Information

Scope and Methodology

The scope of our audit included assessing how the Florida 2 district management prepared for and responded to Hurricane Ian in Everglades City, FL. To accomplish our objective, we:

- Interviewed Postal Service officials from headquarters, the Southern Area, and the Florida 2 District to determine the events surrounding Hurricane Ian.
- Interviewed U.S. Postal Inspection Service officials to understand their role in emergency preparedness, response, and recovery during and after Hurricane Ian.
- Visited the Everglades City Post Office to talk with managers and supervisors affected by Hurricane Ian.
- Assessed hurricane emergency preparedness plans, guides, and procedures for safeguarding people, property, and products.

We conducted this performance audit from December 2023 through May 2024 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 discussed our observations and conclusions with management on April 25, 2024, and included their comments where appropriate.

In planning and conducting the audit, we obtained an understanding of the Florida 2 District office internal control structure to help determine the nature, timing, and extent of our audit procedures. We reviewed the management controls for overseeing the program and mitigating associated risks. Additionally, we assessed the internal control components and underlying principles, and we determined that all the following five components were significant to our audit objective: control environment, risk assessment, control activities, information and communication, and monitoring.

We developed our audit work to ensure that we assessed these controls. Based on the work performed, we identified internal control deficiencies related to control activities, information and communication, and monitoring that were significant within the context of our objectives. Our recommendations, if implemented, should correct the weaknesses we identified.

We assessed the reliability of the financial performance report data by performing tests for data completeness, reasonableness, and accuracy. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

Prior Audit Coverage

Report Title	Objective	Report Number	Final Report Date	Monetary Impact
<i>U.S. Postal Service Emergency Preparedness: Winter Storm Elliott</i>	Review the Postal Service's actions before, during, and after Winter Storm Elliott.	23-094-R24	3/12/2024	\$0
<i>U.S. Postal Service's Plans to Resolve Post Office Suspensions</i>	Assess the effectiveness of the Postal Service's plans to resolve post office suspensions.	21-239-R23	5/17/2023	\$0
<i>U.S. Postal Service and Emergency Response: A History of Delivering for the American Public</i>	1) Describe the Postal Service's role in the federal emergency response structure, 2) Identify select historical examples of how the Postal Service participated in emergency response, and 3) Describe how the Postal Service has participated in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.	RISC-WP-20-006	9/10/2020	\$0

Appendix B: Management's Comments



May 15, 2024

JOHN CIHOTA
DIRECTOR, AUDIT SERVICES

SUBJECT: Management Response: U.S. Postal Service Emergency Preparedness: Hurricane Ian (Report Number 24-041-DRAFT)

Thank you for providing the Postal Service an opportunity to review and comment on the findings contained in the draft audit report, *U.S. Postal Service Emergency Preparedness: Hurricane Ian*.

Finding 1: Preparedness Efforts at Everglades City Post Office

We agree with this finding that the Everglades City postmaster did not safeguard the mail, retail products, PO Box records, or equipment prior to landfall of Hurricane Ian, in accordance with Postal Service guidance.

Finding 2: Recovery Efforts for the Everglades City Post Office

We disagree with this finding. On Sept 13, 2023, the Florida 2 District received approval to move back into Everglades City Post Office. The internet and telephone service outage in the town of Everglades City was out of postal control. The office was sent a CBBR that was not operational as it could not connect to the cellular broadband. District management also made multiple attempts to order the retail counter scale and were told the scale was back ordered at first, then subsequently were told they did not make it any longer. A retail counter scale was finally received in the office.

Management disagrees with the monetary impact. Although there was a revenue loss, there was a revenue increase at an office less than 10 miles from Everglades City.

Following are our comments on each of the four recommendations.

Recommendation 1: We recommend the Vice President, Retail and Delivery Operations, Southern Area, direct the District Manager, Florida 2 to develop a procedure to document and confirm that hurricane preparedness tasks are completed before a storm.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management agrees with this recommendation.

Management will implement a repository for photo evidence of preparedness efforts prior to a storm's projected landfall.

Checklists are provided with the step-by-step instructions for ensuring people, property and product are accounted for at each step prior to projected landfall (i.e. established for 120, 96, 72, 48, 36 and 24 hours prior to projected landfall). These checklists include mitigation measures such as elevating assets to a higher level, retaining tarp equipment and procuring sandbags.

Target Implementation Date: 07/31/2024

Responsible Official: District Managers

Recommendation 2: We recommend the Vice President, Corporate Affairs, update hurricane preparedness guidance to include the clarification of appropriate mitigation measures, such as removing or elevating assets to a level necessary to reduce the risk of flood damage to customers' mail, postal products, and property.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management agrees with this recommendation. We have updated the Hurricane Preparedness Guide (Version 7, May 2024) by clarifying the differences between riverine and surge flooding (Section 7, pre-landfall checklists) and clarifying when to elevate and/or remove assets for forecast flooding of 4 feet or less and removing assets for forecast flooding greater than four feet if sufficient time is available to do this safely (Section 3-3 Property – Facility checklist and Section 7, pre-landfall checklists). The final version was provided and management requests to close recommendation 2 with issuance of the final report.

Target Implementation Date: 06/30/2024

Responsible Official: Executive Director, Continuity and Preparedness

Recommendation 3: We recommend the Vice President, Retail and Delivery Operations, Southern Area, 1) develop and implement a communication process to verify the timely recovery of postal retail services after weather or other emergencies, and 2) adopt a contingency plan to resume retail operations manually when automated functions become unavailable.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management disagrees with this recommendation.

The Vice President, Retail and Delivery Operations Southern Area agrees that a communication plan to include a repository to document actions taken as they occur will assist in verifying the timely recovery of postal retail services. The process for post recovery will include an established timeline for actions to be taken.

The Vice President, Retail and Delivery Operations Southern Area disagrees; a contingency plan already exists to resume retail operations manually in RSS offices. This is a manual office so a manual contingency plan would be redundant.

Target Implementation Date: N/A

Responsible Official: N/A

Recommendation 4: We recommend the Vice President, Network and Compute Technology develop a plan, with actionable milestones, to restore internet and phone service to the Everglades City Post Office.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management agrees with this recommendation to restore internet and phone service to the Everglades City Post Office.

The Network and Infrastructure organization deployed a Cellular Broad Band Router (CBBR) to the Everglades City Post Office. The unit was shipped out on February 28th and came online Mar 7. A screenshot status of this ticket, showing the date the unit came online was provided. Phone service was restored on May 1. A report showing phone usage was also provided. Management requests recommendation 4 be closed with issuance of the final report.

Target Implementation Date: 06/30/2024

Responsible Official: Vice President, Network and Compute Technology

E-SIGNED by JUDITH.A DE TOROK
on 2024-05-15 17:31:30 EDT

Judy A. De Torok
Vice President, Corporate Affairs

E-SIGNED by LINDA.K CRAWFORD
on 2024-05-15 15:47:27 EDT

Linda K. Crawford
Vice President, Retail & Delivery Operations, (Southern)

E-SIGNED by WILLIAM.E KOETZ
on 2024-05-15 15:25:47 EDT

William E. Koetz
Vice President, Network and Compute Technology

cc: Corporate Audit Response Management

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE



Contact us via our [Hotline](#) and [FOIA](#) forms. Follow us on social networks. Stay informed.

1735 North Lynn Street, Arlington, VA 22209-2020
(703) 248-2100

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