Mail Theft Mitigation and Response: Seattle, WA

AUDIT REPORT

Report Number 26-100-R27 | October 14, 2026



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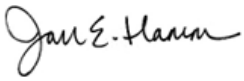
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

October 14, 2026

MEMORANDUM FOR: ELVIN MERCADO
CHIEF RETAIL AND DELIVERY OFFICER AND EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

GARY R. BARKSDALE
CHIEF POSTAL INSPECTOR

TRENT MCNEAL
DISTRICT MANAGER, WASHINGTON DISTRICT



FROM: Jan E. Hamm
Deputy Assistant Inspector General
for Field Operations

SUBJECT: Audit Report – Mail Theft Mitigation and Response: Seattle, WA (Report Number 26-100-R27)

This report presents the results of our audit of Mail Theft Mitigation and Response: Seattle, WA.

All recommendations require U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General's (OIG) concurrence before closure. Consequently, the OIG requests written confirmation when corrective actions are completed. All recommendations 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.

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesy provided by your staff. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact John Littlejohn, Director, Mail Safety & Security Directorate, or me at 703-248-2100.

Attachment

cc: Postmaster General
Corporate Audit and Response Management

Results

Background

This report presents the results of our self-initiated audit of Mail Theft Mitigation and Response at Wedgwood Station and Seattle Carrier Annex in Seattle, WA (Project Number 26-100). These sites are in the Washington District of the Retail and Delivery Operations, WestPac Area. Our objective was to assess the U.S. Postal Service's actions taken to mitigate and respond to mail theft at selected facilities in Seattle, WA. See Appendix A for additional information about this audit.

The Postal Service's mission is to provide the nation with trusted, safe, and secure communications and mail services. In fiscal year (FY) 2025, Seattle, WA, facilities processed more than 1.3 billion mailpieces. Unfortunately, these operations continue to be disrupted due to mail theft. Mail theft occurs in various ways, such as individuals using stolen universal keys — called arrow keys — to access collection boxes, outdoor parcel lockers, cluster box units (CBU), and apartment panels. Additionally, mail theft occurs when individuals fish[1] or break into collection boxes with force, and through residential mailbox break-ins, package theft, and carrier robberies.

Concerns about how the Postal Service prevents and responds to mail theft frequently appear in the media and have been a topic of congressional hearings and inquiries sent to the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG). News articles have also highlighted carrier robberies and theft from blue collection boxes and CBUs nationally, which have included customers' credit cards, checks, and social security benefits.

Mail Theft Prevention Efforts

In May 2023, the Postal Service and U.S. Postal Inspection Service announced a joint initiative called Project Safe Delivery to combat the rise in mail theft and carrier robberies. Included in this initiative were new prevention efforts designed to reduce mail theft such as high security collection boxes (HSCB),[2] electronic arrow locks (eLock),[3] and modified arrow lock (MAL)[4] keys specifically in areas determined to have high incidents of mail theft. In January 2024, the Postal Service announced the "Go Forward Plan," which included the deployment of high security electronic locks (HSEL)[5] in select cities. Nationally, as of December 2025, the Postal Service had installed 23,190 HSCBs and 47,360 eLocks, as we reported in our May 2026 mail theft response follow-up report.[6] As of May 2026, in Seattle, WA, the Postal Service had installed 233 HSCBs and 308 eLocks but had not installed any HSELs.

Mail Theft Complaints in Seattle, WA

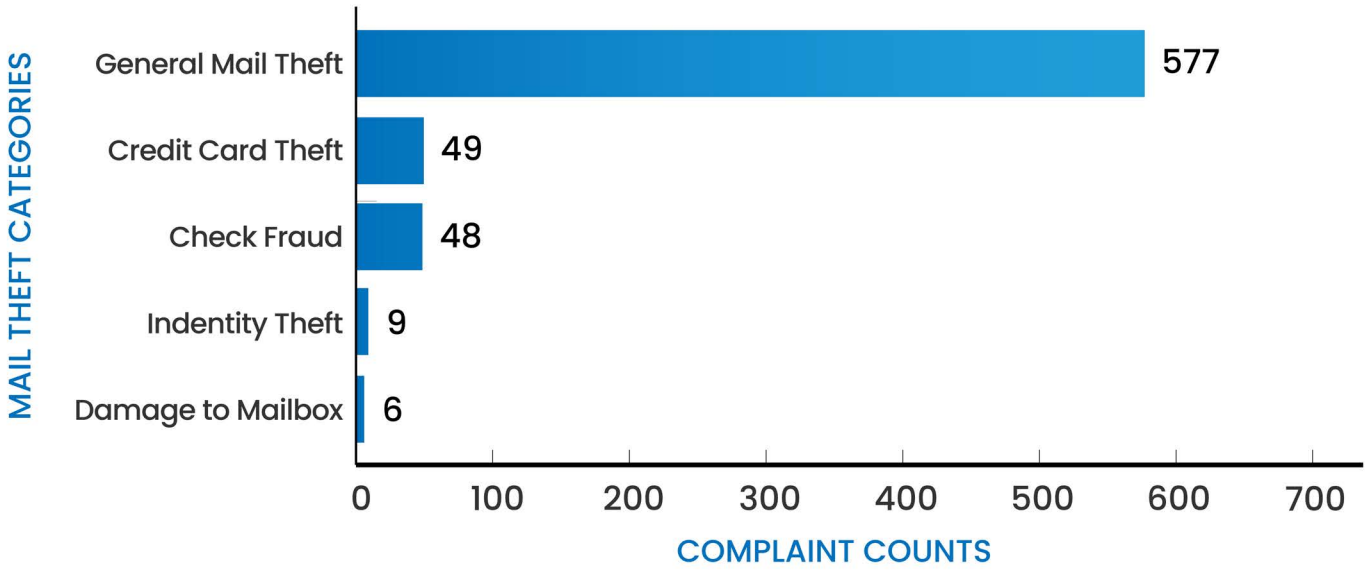
The Postal Inspection Service, which is the federal law enforcement arm of the Postal Service, uses an internal database[7] to retain and review complaints related to mail theft, financial crimes, and other issues. It receives these complaints through a variety of sources such as phone calls, letter correspondence, the Postal Service's website,[8] and referrals made by federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies. Additionally, the Postal Service is required to timely report lost, missing, or stolen keys to the Postal Inspection Service. The Postal Inspection Service is then required to enter those keys within seven days of the reported loss into another internal database, the Case Management System (CMS). The Postal Inspection Service then compiles postal-related complaints alleging criminal

1 Mail fishing is a scheme where criminals use a handmade tool to pull envelopes out of collection boxes.
2 The HSCB, compared to a standard blue collection box, has enhanced security features such as a narrow mail slot without the lever/door, finger rakes to deter mail fishing, and reinforced steel.
3 The eLocks add an extra layer of security by requiring dual authentication — [redacted] They are designed to deter counterfeiting of keys and are used in areas that sustain or are subject to high incidents of mail attacks or losses.
4 The MAL has a higher security cylinder for use in areas that sustain or are subject to high incidents of mail attacks or losses.
5 The HSEL is an improved version of the eLock and was designed to be useable for different types of mailboxes.
6 *Follow up to U.S. Postal Service's and U.S. Postal Inspection Service's Response to Mail Theft* (Report Number 25-137-R26, dated May 19, 2026).
7 Financial Crimes Database (FCD) is the system that houses complaints submitted to the Postal Inspection Service.
8 Customer 360, or C360, is the system that houses complaints submitted on the Postal Service's website.

conduct and lost/stolen arrow key data to identify target areas at risk for mail theft. It shares this information with the Postal Service's Business and Consumer Technology and Delivery Operations groups to determine potential deployment locations for mail theft prevention initiatives.

From October 1, 2025, to March 31, 2026, customers submitted 689 mail theft-related complaints to the Postal Service in Seattle, WA, as shown in Figure 1.[9]

Figure 1. Customer Complaints From October 1, 2025, Through March 31, 2026



Source: Financial Crime Database (FCD) and OIG analysis.

During this same timeframe, the Postal Inspection Service jacketed[10] two area cases, two carrier robbery cases, and three mail theft cases, and one additional mail theft case, which has since been closed in Seattle, WA. The Postal Inspection Service's efforts to prioritize mail theft investigations and customer complaints are key to addressing mail theft. Postal inspectors accept and review customer complaints about alleged mail theft, conduct investigations, and submit cases for prosecution.

Findings Summary

We found deficiencies in tracking, safeguarding, managing, and reporting of arrow and MAL keys at the two facilities visited in Seattle, WA. In addition, we found that CBUs sampled were mostly in good working condition.

9 Seattle, WA, is ranked 18th out of 12,458 total locations nationwide with at least one mail theft-related complaint.
10 Cases are jacketed to document specific tasks in investigations conducted by the Inspection Service.

Finding # 1: Arrow and MAL Key Accountability

What We Found

The Wedgwood Station and Seattle Carrier Annex did not properly track and safeguard their arrow and MAL key[11] inventories. Specifically, key inventories at each facility were not accurately reported in Retail and Delivery Analytics and Reports (RADAR).[12]

Key Inventory Tracking

According to the June 2026 RADAR monthly arrow key certifications,[13] the Wedgwood Station and Seattle Carrier Annex had a combined total of 388 keys that facility management recorded as verified[14] and 565 recorded as not verified.[15] From June 23 through June 25, 2026, we performed a physical inventory of keys at the Wedgwood Station and Seattle Carrier Annex and compared the results to the June 2026 RADAR monthly arrow key certification. We found deficiencies related to accuracy of key verification, number of authorized keys, and key status updates at both facilities.

For the 388 keys recorded as verified in RADAR, we found that 69 (18 percent) were missing, leaving mail receptacles across seven ZIP Codes in Seattle, WA, at risk for mail theft, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Keys Recorded as Verified in RADAR

Facility Name	Key Status	Keys Found	Keys Not Found	Totals
Wedgwood Station	In-Use	37	2	39
	In-Vault	25	7	32
	Subtotal	62	9	71
Seattle Carrier Annex	In-Use	192	25	217
	In-Vault	62	20	82
	Damaged	2	13	15
	Code or Serial Incorrect	1	2	3
	Subtotal	257	60	317
	Total	**319**	**69**	**388**

Source: OIG analysis based on observations and reviews of June 2026 Monthly RADAR Certifications.

For the 565 keys recorded as not verified in RADAR, we found 90 (16 percent) were on-site and 475 (84 percent) were not on-site. For those keys not on-site, facility management was unable to provide supporting documentation to show that they were either sent to the National Material Customer Service (NMCS)[16] or that it notified the Postal Inspection Service, as required (see Table 2).

11 The word "key" will refer to arrow and MAL keys throughout the report.
12 The Postal Service's RADAR system provides a national platform of current inventory of arrow and MAL keys at all facilities.
13 In FY 2023, the Postal Service began requiring facilities to complete monthly and semi-annual arrow key certifications, which are conducted by the installation head (or designee) to validate and maintain all key accountability and proper reporting.
14 Verified means the keys were physically confirmed against the current inventory. Facility management selects "Yes" in the verified column when completing the monthly and semi-annual RADAR arrow key certifications.
15 Not verified is when facility management selects "No" in the verified column when completing the monthly and semi-annual RADAR arrow key certifications.
16 The NMCS is responsible for receiving damaged keys.

Table 2. Keys Recorded as Not Verified in RADAR

Facility Name	Inventory Key Status	Keys Found	Keys Not Found	Totals
Wedgwood Station	Damaged	18	158	176
	Returned	13	5	18
	Stolen		3	3
	Subtotal	31	166	197
Seattle Carrier Annex	Damaged	26	42	68
	Returned		78	78
	Stolen			
	Not at this Office	2	81	83
	Duplicate		3	3
	Code or Serial Incorrect	31	105	136
	Subtotal	59	309	368
	Totals	**90**	**475**	**565**

Source: OIG analysis based on observations and reviews of June 2026 Monthly RADAR Certifications.

Management also stated that it could not remove keys from the RADAR inventory that were no longer at the facility. For example, Wedgwood Station management showed us two keys that had two separate entries in RADAR, but it was unable to remove the two entries that no longer applied. Further, following our site visit, facility management confirmed that eight keys were duplicate entries in RADAR, including four at Wedgwood Station and four at Seattle Carrier Annex.

We also observed a combined total of 122 additional keys on-site that were not recorded in RADAR, including 14 keys at Wedgwood Station and 108 keys at the Seattle Carrier Annex. Postal Service policy states that a facility's total authorized keys — both those in use and those kept as additional — are determined by the number of routes it serves, along with an allowed additional-key range defined as either a specific number or a percentage. The total number of keys we found on-site at both facilities exceeded the authorized key thresholds. Specifically,

- Wedgwood Station provided delivery services for 80 routes.[17] Therefore, it was authorized a total of 92 keys. However, we found 107 keys on-site, which is 15 keys (16 percent) over the authorized amount.
- Seattle Carrier Annex provides delivery services for 120 routes. Therefore, it was authorized a total of 144 keys. However, we found 423 keys on-site, which is 279 keys (194 percent) over the authorized amount.

In addition, we found that local management did not always update RADAR to reflect the correct key status for the keys we observed at both facilities. Specifically, for the keys recorded in RADAR, 15 of the 93 (16 percent) keys found at Wedgwood Station and 32 of the 316 (10 percent) keys found at the Seattle Carrier Annex had an inaccurate key status,[18] as shown in Table 3.

17 Wedgwood Station management stated that it has keys that service both Wedgwood Station (33 routes) and Bitterlake Station (47 routes).
18 The 93 keys at Wedgwood Station includes the number of keys found on site as shown in Table 1 (62 keys) and Table 2 (31 keys). The 316 keys at Seattle Carrier Annex includes the number of keys found on site as shown in Table 1 (257 keys) and Table 2 (59 keys).

Table 3. Keys With Inaccurate Key Use Status in RADAR

Facility Name	RADAR Recorded Key Status	OIG Physical Observation – Key Status			Totals
		Damaged	In-Use	In-Vault	
Wedgwood Station	In-Use			2	2
	Returned			12	12
	Damaged			1	1
	Subtotal			15	15
Seattle Carrier Annex	In-Use	11			11
	In-Vault	5	3		8
	Not at this Office	2			2
	Code or Serial Incorrect	10	1		11
	Subtotal	28	4		32
	Totals	**28**	**4**	**15**	**47**

Source: OIG analysis based on observations and reviews of June 2026 Monthly RADAR Certifications.

Safeguarding Keys

We found that management at the Wedgwood Station and Seattle Carrier Annex did not properly safeguard arrow keys in accordance with Postal Service policy. Although required to follow the 24-hour arrow key accountability process as designated Tier 1 facilities,[19] management at both post offices used different methods to document arrow key accountability, and neither used the standard form required by Postal Service policy.[20]

Specifically, management at the Wedgwood Station was not using the 24-hour arrow key accountability process or a physical inventory sheet. Management stated that it scans the supervisor's badge when issuing and collecting keys; however, this process did not occur during our site visit. After our site visits, we reviewed the Regional Intelligent Mail Servers (RIMS)[21] database for scan data, but we did not identify scans recorded for all keys in the system. Additionally, we observed 31 of 90 (34 percent) keys in the unlocked accountable cage and retail counter area (see Figures 2 and 3). Further, we received conflicting answers during interviews with management on how the accountable cage and key cabinets were secured. During our interviews, management stated that the accountable cage, where the keys were maintained, was locked when not in use. However, management also stated that if carriers return in the evening after management has departed, they are allowed to leave the keys in the accountable cage area without checking them in.

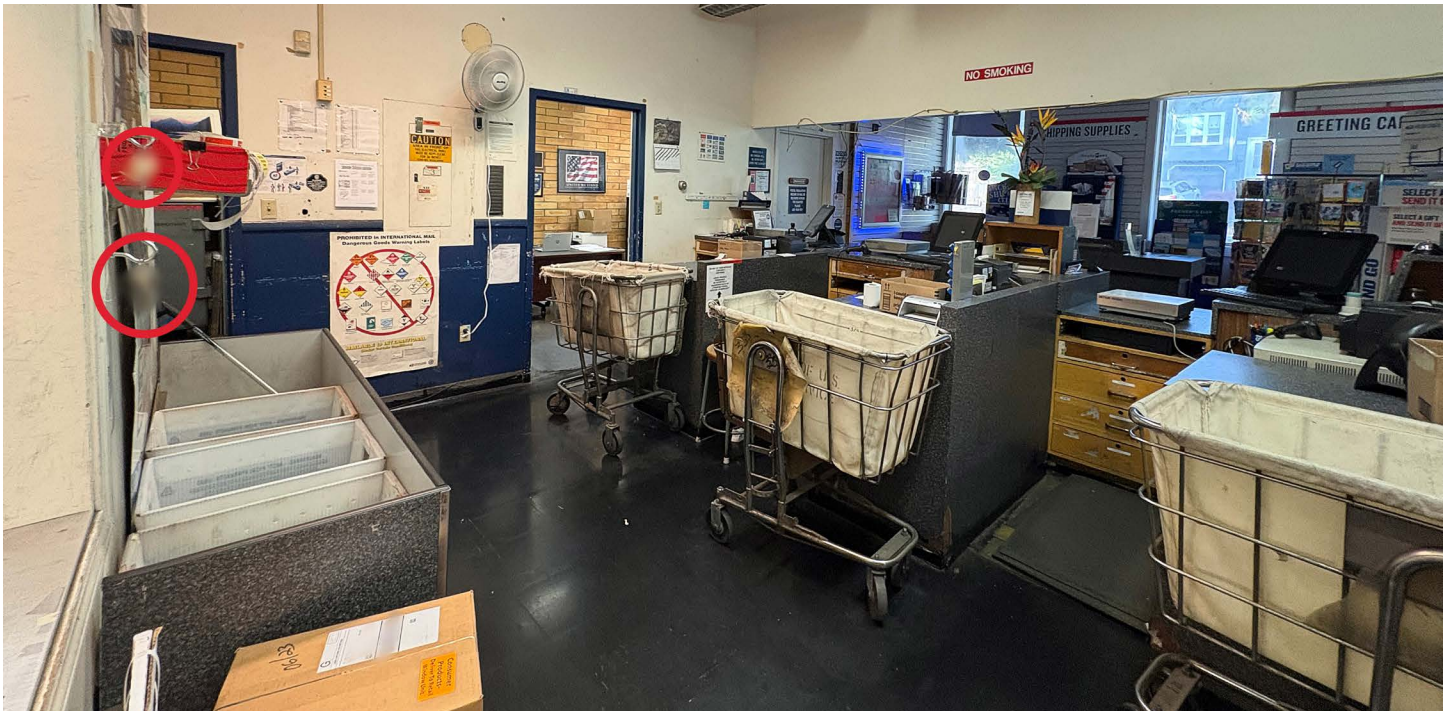
19 Tier 1 is a category of postal units that falls under the jurisdiction of the highest-level postmaster.
20 Arrow Key Guidebook, Standard Work Instructions Updated: March 2025, Page 7, Employee Duties and Responsibilities states "For all Arrow/MAL keys, employees must sign out using PS Form 1106, Arrow Key - Daily Accountable Log, use key check if applicable, or perform electronic equivalent."
21 The RIMS database stores scan data from devices such as the mobile delivery device, arrow key inventory, arrow key accountable records, and arrow key use report.

Figure 2. Key Cabinets in an Unlocked Accountable Cage at Wedgwood Station



Source: OIG photographs taken at Wedgwood Station on June 23, 2026.

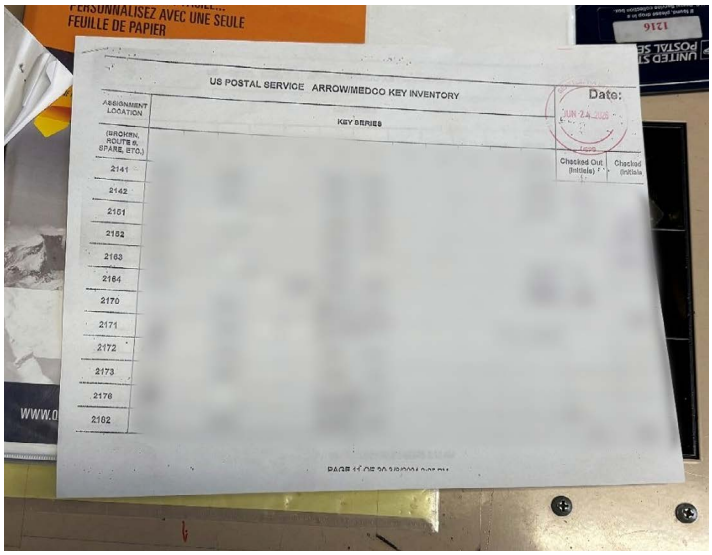
Figure 3. MAL Keys Hanging Near the Retail Counter Area at Wedgwood Station



Source: OIG photograph taken at Wedgwood Station on June 23, 2026.

At the Seattle Carrier Annex, management did not use the 24-hour arrow key accountability process for all keys assigned to city routes while our team was on-site. Although we observed signed Postal Service (PS) Form 1625, *Record of Entry into Registry Section,* documentation and printed arrow key barcode sheets, 186 of 217 (86 percent) keys with an "in-use" status in RADAR did not have completed inventory barcode scans. Also, management used a form that appeared to have been internally created (see Figure 4) to track when keys were issued to carriers rather than the required PS Form 1106, *Arrow Key — Daily Accountable Log*. In addition to using the incorrect forms, check-out/check-in entries on the form were not always completed and did not accurately reflect the status of some keys. Specifically,148 of the 217 (68 percent) keys with an "in-use" status in RADAR were not included on the check-out/check-in form.

Figure 4. Incorrect Key Check-Out/Check-In Form at Seattle Carrier Annex



Source: OIG photographs taken at Seattle Carrier Annex on June 24, 2026.

Additionally, of the total 316 keys we found on-site at the Seattle Carrier Annex and recorded in RADAR, 100 (32 percent) were stored in an unsecured accountable cage area. There were an additional 108 keys we observed at the Seattle Carrier Annex that were not recorded in RADAR, of which six (5 percent) were unsecured.

Lastly, during our physical inventory of keys, we identified a combined total of 119 keys that did not have the required chain attached, including 10 at Wedgwood Station and 109 at the Seattle Carrier Annex. The chain is used to securely attach the key to the carrier and collector belts or clothing to protect the key from being left in a lock or dropped.

Reporting Lost or Stolen Keys

Wedgwood Station management did not properly report three keys stolen in October 2025 that were listed on the RADAR *Lost or Stolen Arrow Key Incident Report* to the Postal Inspection Service. Postal Inspection Service personnel also confirmed that these keys were not reported to them or recorded on their CMS Arrow Key Log. For the Seattle Carrier Annex, there were no reported lost keys at the time of our on-site review. Following our site visit, a new manager at that facility stated that when management performed the next monthly arrow key certification, it identified 30 keys that were lost. Management reported the lost keys to the Postal Inspection Service, and they were all assigned to one Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) number — issued by the Postal Inspection Service and used to track the status of reported keys — further complicating the process to manage the tracking of individual keys for reordering purposes or if any are subsequently found or identified.

Response to Postal Inspection Service Key Audits

Postal Inspection Service Seattle Division personnel perform periodic key audits at select facilities. After completing the audits, it issues 30-day letters to facility management that outline deficiencies identified, applicable guidance, and related recommendations. It also requests that facility management describe any actions or intended actions to correct the deficiencies identified during the reviews. Postal Inspection Service Seattle Division management noted that, typically, facility management does not respond to the 30-day letters. Of the 29 arrow key audits completed by the Seattle

Division between June 2025 and July 2026, facility management did not respond to 20 (69 percent). For example, Postal Inspection Service Seattle Division management noted that it performed arrow key audits in February 2024 and April 2024 at the Seattle Carrier Annex; however, no response was received on action plans taken to address the deficiencies.

Why Did It Occur

Local and district management did not provide sufficient oversight of the daily accountability, safeguarding, and key certification processes. Additionally, managers and supervisors responsible for daily arrow key accountability at both facilities were unaware of the training, and at the time of our visit, not all employees assigned the training had completed the required annual Daily Arrow Key Accountability training for FY 2026.[22]

Local management did not always reconcile, add, or update key statuses during monthly and semi-annual key certifications. Specifically, Wedgwood Station management did not perform the 24-hour arrow key accountability process or maintain a physical inventory form due to a lack of management oversight. Seattle Carrier Annex management stated that position turnover resulted in a lack of continuity and accountability for key inventory control processes. Prior detailed managers were not adequately briefed or trained on arrow key accountability requirements, leading to procedural missteps.

Management at both facilities had more than the authorized thresholds of keys because district-level authorizers approved requests for replacement and additional keys despite having incomplete request information. While Wedgwood Station management was unaware of its excess keys, Seattle Carrier Annex management stated that it was recently assigned to the facility and was not aware of the significant number of excess keys. Additionally, multiple RADAR entries for keys that are no longer at the facilities continue to exist because there was no process that allowed these keys to be removed from the system. Therefore, when management completed the monthly and semi-annual key certifications, it was still required to verify the status for keys no longer in their possession. Additionally, we received conflicting answers from Postal Service and Postal Inspection Service management regarding the assignment of individual CAD numbers used for reporting lost and stolen keys.

Also, at the time of our site visit, management at both facilities was untrained on the process for reporting lost or stolen keys in RADAR and to the Postal Inspection Service. After our site visit, Seattle Carrier Annex management took positive steps to properly report lost keys via both methods.

Lastly, while the Postal Inspection Service Seattle Division performs periodic key audits at select facilities, management stated that it does not have authority, nor does policy exist, to ensure that facility management responds and takes actions to address the key deficiencies identified.

What Should Have Happened

In March 2025, Postal Service Headquarters management updated its arrow key procedures[23] that included standard work instructions for arrow and MAL key accountability and the 24-hour arrow key accountability process. According to the procedures, local management is required to complete arrow key training and follow Postal Service policy for accountability and safeguarding of key inventory. Specifically, it requires local management to maintain accurate inventories and secure control over keys. Key accountability should be carried out according to the 24-hour arrow key accountability guidance,[24] or if issues arise, management should revert to the manual process using the PS Form 1106 for the daily key check-in/check-out. Local management should report lost or stolen keys immediately to the Postal Inspection Service and document them in RADAR. It should also notify the Postal Inspection Service immediately if the keys

22 National Training is called the Daily Arrow Key Accountability (Course Number 2024DLOP6468V01).
23 *USPS Arrow Key Guidebook Standard Work Instructions, updated March 2025.*
24 See Figure 4, *Follow up to U.S. Postal Service's and U.S. Postal Inspection Service's Response to Mail Theft* (Report Number 25-137-R26, dated May 19, 2026).

are found or returned. Also, according to the Postal Operations Manual,[25] carriers must always keep arrow lock keys attached to their clothing by a chain while on duty.

Further, facilities do not have the capability to order new keys directly as only authorized personnel with system access may submit requests. To ensure proper authorization and accountability, facilities must provide accurate and complete information to include the CAD number, if applicable. Any request that contains insufficient or inaccurate information would be denied by the authorized district-level requesters. Finally, there is no policy requiring that each lost or stolen key be assigned a unique CAD number.

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

When management fails to provide adequate oversight and supervision of accountable items and key inventory is not accurately maintained and properly reported, there is an increased risk of lost or stolen keys. Because arrow keys open mailboxes across an entire area or multiple ZIP Codes, damaged, lost, or stolen keys can result in mail theft or the inability to collect or deliver mail. This may damage the Postal Service's reputation and diminish public trust in the nation's mail system.

> "When management fails to provide adequate oversight and supervision of accountable items and key inventory is not accurately maintained and properly reported, there is an increased risk of lost or stolen keys."

Recommendation #1

We recommend the **Washington District Manager** establish internal controls to verify that all arrow and modified arrow lock keys are accurately recorded in the Retail and Delivery Analytics and Reports system and, when necessary, returned to National Materials Customer Service or reported to the Postal Inspection Service for the Wedgwood Station and Seattle Carrier Annex.

Recommendation #2

We recommend the **Washington District Manager** establish internal controls to verify that 1) appropriate personnel complete the Daily Arrow Key Accountability Training annually, 2) facilities are following the 24-hour arrow key accountability process, or use the Postal Service Form 1106, as required, and 3) the required carrier chain is attached for all arrow and modified arrow lock keys in use for the Wedgwood Station and Seattle Carrier Annex.

Recommendation #3

We recommend the **Chief Retail and Delivery Officer and Executive Vice President** develop and implement a process for the reconciliation of arrow and modified arrow lock key inventories that will allow a facility to remove duplicate entries or missing keys that are no longer at the facility from the inventory.

Recommendation #4

We recommend the **Washington District Manager** establish internal controls to validate that facilities are remediating arrow and modified arrow lock key deficiencies identified by — and reporting remediation actions to—the Postal Inspection Service.

25 *Postal Operations Manual, section 633.42 Arrow Lock Keys,* dated September, 2025.

Recommendation #5

We recommend the **Inspector in Charge, Security Group** establish internal controls to require the District Manager to be included in all facility arrow and modified arrow lock key audit results communications.

Recommendation #6

We recommend the **Inspector in Charge, Security Group** and **Director, Chief Retail Delivery Operations, City Delivery Strategy and Policy** jointly establish guidance for issuance of Computer-Aided Dispatch numbers to be used for reporting lost and stolen arrow and modified arrow lock keys.

Postal Service Response

Management agreed with finding 1 and all recommendations.

Regarding recommendation 1, management stated that it established internal controls to ensure that all keys are accurately recorded in the RADAR system, returned to the NMCS, and/or reported to the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, when necessary. Management also stated that it will conduct unit reviews to ensure compliance. The target implementation date is November 30, 2026.

Regarding recommendation 2, management stated that it established internal controls to verify that appropriate personnel complete the Daily Arrow Key Accountability Annual training, adding that 100 percent of Washington District personnel completed the training. Management also stated that it established verifications to ensure that Tier 1 facilities use either the 24-hour arrow key accountability process or Postal Service Form 1106. The target implementation date is November 30, 2026.

Regarding recommendation 3, management stated that it is coordinating with the RADAR team to establish a process for removing duplicate entries and keys that are no longer at the facility. The target implementation date is January 31, 2027.

Regarding recommendation 4, management stated that it will create a log to document arrow key deficiencies identified by the Postal Inspection Service and monitor the abatement of the findings. The target implementation date is January 31, 2027.

Regarding recommendation 5, management stated that it will publish a key review procedure guide to require Postal Inspection Service personnel, including the District Manager, on notifications concerning the results of arrow key and modified arrow lock key audit results. The target implementation date is April 30, 2027.

Lastly, regarding recommendation 6, management stated that it is actively collaborating with key stakeholders to review and update current policy to further outline the process for reporting lost/stolen keys to the Postal Inspection Service's NLECC in obtaining and recording CAD numbers. The target implementation date is April 30, 2027.

OIG Evaluation

The OIG considers management's comments responsive to recommendations 1 through 6 as corrective actions should resolve the issues identified in the report.

Finding # 2: Cluster Box Unit Reviews

What We Found

While on-site, we conducted a review of mail receptacles in the Washington District and found that 90 percent were in good working condition. We selected the sample using complaint data to identify locations with reported issues such as mail theft, break-ins, and vandalism. We reviewed 20 mail receptacles, all of which were CBUs, distributed across seven facility delivery ZIP Codes. We found that 18 of the 20 (90 percent) CBUs were in good condition, while two (10 percent) had multiple deficiencies, including corrosion, door gaps, and signs of tampering (pry marks). See Figures 5 and 6.

Figures 5 and 6. Damaged Cluster Box Units in the Washington District





Source: OIG photographs taken in the Seattle, WA, area on June 24, 2026.

Why Did It Occur

Neighbors we interviewed stated that they reported any instances of CBU physical damage or signs of tampering to their local post office. The neighbors shared that in most cases, the mailbox and/or the lock were replaced; however, we did not identify any repair tickets for these boxes. Therefore, it is unclear whether they were repaired by the Postal Service or the homeowners' association. We found in a previous mail theft audit report[26] that there is no policy requiring recording and tracking of CBU ownership because the Postal Service relies on the local knowledge of staff in the field for this information. In a more recent mail theft audit report, we found that responsibility for repairing broken or damaged locks is not clearly established; we recommended that

26 *Mail Theft Mitigation and Response: Sacramento, CA* (Report Number 24-163-R25, dated March 20, 2025).

the Postal Service clarify Postal and customer fee responsibility to replace locks on Postal and privately owned CBUs after mail theft and non-mail theft related incidents.[27] Therefore, we are not making a recommendation for these matters in this report.

What Should Have Happened

Since December 2017, Postal Service policy[28] states that the customer is responsible for the purchase, installation, maintenance, repair, and replacement of mail receptacles. This policy also states that the Postal Service furnishes its own master access lock with CBUs that allow mail to be delivered. This lock is not available to developers and builders to pre-install on mail receptacles. Postal Service Headquarters management was unaware of any guidance prior to 2017. Regarding customer access lock replacements, Postal Service policy for new developments — residential and commercial — states that the builder or property owner is responsible for providing lock and key service for privately owned CBUs; the Postal Service furnishes the master access lock. For Postal Service-owned CBUs, policy states that the Postal Service installs new locks at the customers' expense for lost keys.[29]

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

While most CBUs we reviewed were in good condition, the Postal Service is at increased risk of mail theft due to damaged boxes. Additionally, these boxes represent the Postal Service's image and directly impact the public's perception of the Postal Service's reputation and branding.

Postal Service Response

Management agreed with finding 2.

OIG Evaluation

The OIG considers management's comments responsive to the finding.

> "While most CBUs we reviewed were in good condition, the Postal Service is at increased risk of mail theft due to damaged boxes."

27 *Mail Theft Mitigation and Response: Las Vegas, NV* (Report Number 26-101-R26, dated September 30, 2026).
28 *National Delivery Planning Standards, a Guide for Builders and Developers*, dated December 2017.
29 Postal Operations Manual, Updated May 31, 2024, Section 632.22(a) and (b) – Locks and Keys.

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Appendix A: Additional Information

Scope and Methodology

The scope of our audit included a review of the Postal Service's processes and procedures for reporting and responding to mail theft, carrier robberies, key accountability, the physical condition of mail receptacles, deployment of mail theft initiatives, and mail theft complaints received from October 1, 2025, through March 31, 2026, in Seattle, WA.

Based on information obtained by OIG staff and the number of customers' mail-theft-related complaints submitted, we selected a sample of postal facilities, including Postal Service annex and delivery units and mail receptacles in Seattle, WA. To make our site selections, we considered data from C360 (customer complaints), FCD, and the OIG Hotline,[30] and we reviewed arrow key data from RIMS, and Arrow Key Inventory from October 2025 to July 2026. Furthermore, the scope includes the Postal Service's and Postal Inspection Service's processes for addressing mail theft related issues.

To accomplish our objective, we:

- Reviewed policies and procedures related to reporting and responding to mail theft, carrier robberies, arrow key accountability, and box condition and accountability.
- Assessed the deployment and installation of mail theft initiatives to include HSCBs and eLocks in Seattle, WA.
- Assessed the current and future pilots of HSEL deployments nationwide and in Seattle, WA.
- Performed arrow key and MAL key accountability reviews at the two sites in Seattle, WA.
- Performed physical condition reviews for mail receptacles throughout Seattle, WA.
- Interviewed Postal Service Headquarters, Washington District, and local management to understand roles and responsibilities for reporting mail theft; carrier robberies; missing, lost, or stolen arrow keys; key accountability; addressing physical conditions for mail receptacles, and deployment of current and future mail theft initiatives.
- Interviewed Postal Inspection Service Seattle Division management to understand roles and responsibilities for reporting, responding to, and tracking mail theft, carrier robberies, and missing, lost, or stolen keys.

We conducted this audit from June 2026 through October 2026, 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 September 22, 2026, and included their comments where appropriate.

In planning and conducting the audit, we obtained an understanding of Postal Service 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 the following five components were significant to our audit objective: control environment, risk assessment, control activities, information and communication, and monitoring.

We developed audit work to ensure that we assessed these controls. Based on the work performed, we identified internal control deficiencies related to information and communication, control activities,

30 Customers can access the OIG Hotline via https://hotlineform.uspsoig.gov/en-US/.

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 RADAR, RIMS, and CMS by performing tests for completeness, reasonableness, accuracy, and validity. 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
Mail Theft Mitigation and Response: Las Vegas, NV	To assess the U.S. Postal Service's actions taken to mitigate and respond to mail theft at selected delivery facilities in Las Vegas, NV.	26-101-R26	9/30/26	$17,928,300
Follow-Up to U.S. Postal Service's and U.S. Postal Inspection Service's Response to Mail Theft	To evaluate the U.S. Postal Service's and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service's progress on its mail theft strategy, including actions taken in response to our September 28, 2023, report, U.S. Postal Service's Response to Mail Theft, (22-178-R23).	25-137-R26	5/19/26	None
Mail Theft Mitigation and Response: Houston, TX	To assess the U.S. Postal Service's actions taken to mitigate and respond to mail theft at selected delivery facilities in Houston, TX.	25-023-R25	3/20/25	None
Mail Theft Mitigation and Response: Sacramento, CA	To assess the U.S. Postal Service's actions taken to mitigate and respond to mail theft at selected delivery facilities in the Sacramento, CA area.	24-163-R25	3/20/25	None
Mail Theft Mitigation and Response – Chicago, IL	To assess the U.S. Postal Service's actions taken to mitigate and respond to mail theft in Chicago, IL.	24-100-R24	9/18/2024	None
Mail Theft Mitigation and Response – San Francisco, CA	To assess the U.S. Postal Service's actions taken to mitigate and respond to mail theft in San Francisco, CA.	24-099-R24	8/30/2024	None
Mail Theft Mitigation and Response – Queens, NY	To assess the U.S. Postal Service's actions taken to mitigate and respond to mail theft in Queens, NY.	24-037-R24	5/21/2024	None
U.S. Postal Service's Response to Mail Theft	To evaluate the Postal Service's efforts to respond to mail theft.	22-178-R23	9/28/2023	$1,008,976

Appendix B: Management's Comments

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

October 5, 2026

LAURA LOZON
DIRECTOR, AUDIT SERVICES

SUBJECT: Management Response: *Mail Theft Mitigation and Response: Seattle, WA (26-100-DRAFT)*

Thank you for providing the Postal Service with an opportunity to review and comment on the findings and recommendations contained in the draft audit report, *Mail Theft Mitigation and Response: Seattle, Washington.*

Management **agrees** with Finding # 1: Arrow and MAL Key Accountability
Management **agrees** with Finding # 2: Collection Box Unit Reviews

Following are our comments on each of the six recommendations.

Recommendation 1:
We recommend the Washington District Manager establish internal controls to verify that all arrow and modified arrow lock keys are accurately recorded in the Retail and Delivery Analytics and Reports system and, when necessary, returned to National Materials Customer Service or reported to the Postal Inspection Service for the Wedgwood Station and Seattle Carrier Annex.

Management Response/Action Plan:
Management **agrees** with this recommendation.

Internal controls have been established to ensure that all keys are accurately recorded in the Retail and Delivery Analytics and Reports system and, when necessary, returned to the National Materials Customer Service, and/or reported to the Postal Inspection Service for the Seattle City Post Offices. Unit reviews will be conducted to ensure units are in compliance. Audit and abatements on key controls were finalized in Wedgwood Station 8/7/2026, Audit and abatements on key controls were finalized in Seattle Carrier Annex 8/10/2026.

Target Implementation Date: November 30, 2026

Responsible Official: Station Manager, MSCO, PCES Postmaster

Recommendation 2:
We recommend the Washington District Manager establish internal controls to verify that 1) appropriate personnel complete the Daily Arrow Key Accountability Training annually, 2) facilities are following the 24-hour arrow key accountability process, or use the Postal Service Form 1106, as required, and 3) the required carrier chain is attached for all arrow and modified arrow lock keys in use for the Wedgwood Station and Seattle Carrier Annex.

Management Response/Action Plan:
Management **agrees** with this recommendation.

Internal controls have been established to verify that appropriate personnel complete the Daily Arrow Key Accountability Annual training. Washington District 100% for all employees not on leave. Process verification has been established to ensure the 24-hour arrow key accountability process for city routes at Tier 1 facilities, or using the Postal Service Form 1106, as required. Audit and abatements on key controls were finalized in Wedgwood Station 8/7/2026, Audit and abatements on key controls were finalized in Seattle Carrier Annex 8/10/2026, Validation Audit will be conducted with MPOO and PCES Tier 1 PM to ensure controls have been adhered to that have been established

Target Implementation Date: November 30, 2026

Responsible Official: Station Manager, MSCO, PCES Postmaster

Recommendation 3:
We recommend the Chief Retail and Delivery Officer and Executive Vice President develop and implement a process for the reconciliation of arrow and modified arrow lock key inventories that will allow a facility to remove duplicate entries or missing keys that are no longer at the facility from the inventory.

Management Response/Action Plan:
Management **agrees** with this recommendation.

Management is coordinating with the RADAR team to establish a process for removing duplicate entries and keys that are no longer physically maintained at the facility from inventory records.

Target Implementation Date: January 31, 2027

Responsible Official: Chief Retail and Delivery Officer and Executive Vice President

Recommendation 4:
We recommend the Washington District Manager establish internal controls to validate that facilities are remediating arrow and modified arrow lock key deficiencies identified by — and reporting remediation actions to—the Postal Inspection Service.

Management Response/Action Plan:
Management **agrees** with this recommendation.

Washington District management will create a log to document Inspection Service identified Arrow key deficiencies and monitor abatement of the findings.

Target Implementation Date: January 31, 2027

Responsible Official: Station Manager, MSCO, PCES Postmaster

Recommendation 5:
We recommend the Inspector in Charge, Security Group, establish internal controls to require the District Manager to be included in all facility arrow and modified arrow lock key audit results communications.

Management Response/Action Plan:
Management **agrees** with this recommendation.

Management will publish a key review procedure guide to require Inspection Service personnel to include the District Manager on notifications concerning the results of arrow and modified arrow key accountability reviews.

Target Implementation Date: 04/30/2027

Responsible Official: Inspector in Charge, Security Group

Recommendation 6:
We recommend the Inspector in Charge, Security Group, and Director, Chief Retail Delivery Operations, City Delivery Strategy and Policy, jointly establish guidance for issuance of Computer-Aided Dispatch numbers to be used for reporting lost and stolen arrow and modified arrow lock keys.

Management Response/Action Plan:
Management **agrees** with this recommendation.

Management is actively collaborating with key stakeholders to review and update Helping Hands #25 and the Arrow Key Guidebook to further outline the process for reporting

lost/stolen keys to Inspection Service's NLECC in obtaining and recording Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) numbers.

Target Implementation Date: 04/30/2027

Responsible Official: Inspector in Charge, Security Group and Director, Chief Retail Delivery Operations, City Delivery Strategy and Policy

E-SIGNED by Trent.J Mcneal
on 2026-10-05 15:22:11 EDT

Trent McNeal
District Manager, Washington District

E-SIGNED by EDUARDO.H RUIZ
on 2026-10-06 06:54:55 EDT

Eduardo Ruiz
Vice President of Retail and Delivery Operations, WestPac Area

E-SIGNED by ELVIN MERCADO
on 2026-10-05 16:15:51 EDT

Elvin Mercado
Chief Retail & Delivery Officer and Executive Vice President

E-SIGNED by GARY.R BARKSDALE
on 2026-10-05 19:37:27 EDT

Gary Barksdale
Chief Postal Inspector

Cc: Corporate Audit Response Management

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This document contains sensitive information that has been redacted for public release. These redactions were coordinated with USPS and agreed to by the OIG.