

Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review – Belleville Annex, Belleville, NJ

AUDIT REPORT

Report Number 22-170-1-R23 | October 19, 2022



Transmittal Letter



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

October 19, 2022

MEMORANDUM FOR: MICHAEL P. DEIGNAN
MANAGER, NEW JERSEY DISTRICT

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

FROM: Joseph E. Wolski
Director, Field Operations

SUBJECT: Audit Report – Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions
Review – Belleville Annex, Belleville, NJ (Report Number 22-170-1-R23)

This report presents the results of our audit of Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions – Belleville Annex, Belleville, NJ.

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

Attachment

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

Results

Background

This interim report presents the results of our self-initiated audit of mail delivery, customer service, and property conditions at the Belleville Annex in Belleville, NJ (Project Number 22-170-1). The Belleville Annex is in the New Jersey District of the Atlantic Area and services ZIP Codes 07104, 07109, and 07110. These ZIP Codes serve about 114,608 people and are considered to be urban areas.¹ We judgmentally selected the Belleville Annex based on the number of Stop-the-Clock (STC)² scans occurring at the delivery unit, rather than at the customer's point of delivery, and indicators for undelivered mail.³

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

Our objective was to evaluate mail delivery, customer service, and property conditions at the Belleville Annex in Belleville, NJ.

To accomplish our objective, we focused on five audit areas: delayed mail, package scanning, truck arrival scans, arrow keys,⁴ 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.⁵ During our site visit we reviewed mail conditions; package and truck arrival scanning procedures; arrow keys security procedures; and unit safety, security, and maintenance conditions. We also analyzed the scan status of mailpieces at carrier cases and in the "Notice Left" area⁶ and interviewed unit management and employees. We discussed our observations and conclusions as summarized in

Table 1 with management on October 3, 2022, and included their comments where appropriate.

The Belleville Annex is one of three delivery units⁷ the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) reviewed during the week of August 15, 2022, that are serviced by the Dominick V. Daniels 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 Belleville Annex. We will issue a separate report⁸ that provides the Postal Service with the overall findings and recommendations for all three 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 Belleville Annex. Specifically, we found issues with all the five areas we reviewed (see Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of Results

Audit Area	Issues Identified	
	Yes	No
Delayed Mail	X	
Package Scanning	X	
Truck Arrival Scanning	X	
Arrow Keys	X	
Property Conditions	X	

Source: Results of our fieldwork during the week of August 15, 2022.

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, the population of 114,608 (100 percent) are considered to be urban.

² A scan event that indicates that the U.S. Postal Service has completed its commitment to deliver or attempt to deliver the mailpiece. Examples of STC scans include "Delivered", "Available for Pick-up", and "No Access".

³ The undelivered mail metrics include Customer 360 (C360) inquiries, Informed Delivery inquiries, and non-delivered routes.

⁴ A distinctively shaped key carriers use to open mail receptacles such as street collection boxes and panels of apartment house mailboxes equipped with an arrow lock. Arrow keys are accountable property and subject to strict controls.

⁵ Time of day that clerks have completed distributing mail to the carrier routes.

⁶ The area of a delivery unit where letters or packages that the carriers were unable to deliver are stored for customer pickup.

⁷ The other two units were the Kearny Main Post Office, Kearny, NJ (Project Number 22-170-2); and the Union Post Office, Union, NJ (Project Number 22-170-3).

⁸ Project Number 22-170.

Finding #1: Delayed Mail

What We Found

On the morning of August 16, 2022, we identified 569 pieces of delayed mail (see Table 2) at the hot case⁹ distribution area (see Figure 1) and carrier cases. Specifically, we identified 342 mailpieces in the hot case area and 227 mailpieces in the carrier cases. In addition, this mail was not reported as undelivered in the Delivery Condition Visualization (DCV)¹⁰ system.

Table 2. Type of Delayed Mail

Type of Mail	Hot Cases	Carrier Cases	OIG Count of Delayed Mail
Letters	312	175	487
Flats	30	52	82
Total	342	227	569

Source: OIG count of delayed mail pieces identified during our August 16, 2022 visit.

Figure 1. Delayed Mail in the Hot Case



Source: OIG photo taken August 16, 2022.

Why Did It Occur

The manager stated most of the delayed mail had been inadvertently delivered from the P&DC to the wrong delivery unit and brought to the Belleville Annex later in the afternoon. A supervisor stated that when this occurs the unit attempts to deliver this mail; however, the manager was unaware that it was his responsibility to report in DCV any portion of the mail that the delivery unit is unable to deliver.

What Should Have Happened

Unit management should have ensured that all mail in their possession would be delivered on the day it was committed for delivery and accurately accounted for and reported any remaining delayed mail in DCV. The staff should have notified management of any undelivered mail and management should have inspected the facility in the morning and evening to ensure that all mail had been delivered on the required day. Postal Service policy¹¹ states that all types of First-Class Mail, Priority Mail, and Priority Express Mail are committed for delivery on the day of receipt. In addition, managers are required¹² to report in DCV all mail that remains at a unit after carriers have left for their street duties or upon realization that there would be delayed mail.

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.

⁹ A case designated for final withdrawal of mail as carriers leave the office.

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

¹¹ Committed Mail & Color Code Policy for Marketing Mail stand-up talk, February 2019.

¹² Informed Visibility Delivery Condition Visualization User Guide, March 2022.

Finding #2: Package Scanning

What We Found

Employees improperly scanned packages at the delivery unit – a total of 595 packages between May and July 2022 (see Table 3). Further analysis of STC scan data for these packages showed that about 54.96 percent of them were scanned “Delivery Attempted – No Access to Delivery Location” and 23.53 percent were scanned “Delivered”. 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. In addition, we only included “Delivery Attempted – No Access to Delivery Location” scans performed Monday through Friday to avoid legitimate scans for businesses that are closed on weekends.

In addition, on the morning of August 16, 2022, before carriers arrived for the day, we selected 36 packages¹³ to review and analyze scanning and tracking history.

Of the 36 sampled packages, five (17.24 percent) from the carrier cases had improper scans:

- Two did not have STC scans to let the customer know the status of the package.
- Two were scanned “Delivery Attempted – No Access to Delivery Location” at a location other than at the point of delivery.
- One was scanned “Delivered” instead of “Business Closed”.

Further, one package in the “Notice Left” area was not returned to the sender, as required.¹⁴ This package was eight days past its return date.

Table 3. STC Scans at Delivery Unit

STC Scan Type	May	June	July	Total	Percentage
Delivery Attempted – No Access to Delivery Location	157	88	82	327	54.96%
Delivered	78	28	34	140	23.53%
Delivery Exception – Local Weather Delay	5		62	67	11.26%
No Secure Location Available	5	8	24	37	6.22%
Refused	5	3	1	9	1.51%
Receptacle Full / Item Oversized		3	4	7	1.18%
No Authorized Recipient		4	2	6	1.01%
Delivery Exception – Animal Interference		1	1	2	0.34%
Total	250	135	210	595	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.

*Total percentage does not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

¹³ We reviewed all 29 packages from the carrier cases and all seven packages from the “Notice Left” area.

¹⁴ *Notice Left and Return Guidelines*, dated July 2007, state 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.

Why Did It Occur

These scanning issues occurred because unit management did not adequately monitor and enforce proper package scanning and handling procedures. The PM supervisor stated that he was not aware of the improperly scanned packages, that carriers sometimes do not follow instructions, and that some carriers are unsure which scan is appropriate. In addition, some carriers stated that they did not know when it was appropriate to use STC scans in the office, with one carrier indicating that he did not distinguish between “Business Closed” and “Delivery Attempted – No Access to Delivery Location” scans.

What Should Have Happened

Unit management should have monitored scan performance daily and enforced compliance. The Postal Service’s goal is to ensure proper delivery attempts for mailpieces to the correct address with proper service,¹⁵ which includes scanning packages at the time and location of delivery.¹⁶ 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.

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 mailpieces 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 Postal Service brand.

¹⁵ *Delivery Done Right the First Time* stand-up talk, March 2020.

¹⁶ *Carriers Delivering the Customer Experience* stand-up talk, July 2017.

Finding #3: Truck Arrival Scanning

What We Found

Employees at the Belleville Annex did not scan all incoming trailer/truck barcodes¹⁷ as required. We reviewed data related to morning truck arrival scans from May 1 to July 31, 2022, and found that employees did not perform a scan for 109 of 177 scheduled trucks (61.58 percent) arriving from the Dominick V. Daniels P&DC (see Table 4).

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 May 1 through July 31, 2022

Month	Count of Inbound Trips	Count of Missed Scans	Percentage Missing
May	61	22	36.07%
June	57	37	64.91%
July	59	50	84.75%
Total	177	109	61.58%

Source: OIG analysis of data extracted from the Postal Service's Surface Visibility System.¹⁸

Why Did It Occur

Unit management did not monitor scan performance data to ensure that all trucks received an arrival scan. In addition, the manager stated that he was not aware that the mail handler responsible for scanning was not given proper instructions on truck arrival scanning.

What Should Have Happened

Unit management should have performed reviews to ensure that employees were performing all expected truck scans and instructed employees to perform appropriate trailer/truck barcode scans and enforced the requirement. According to Postal Service policy,¹⁹ 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.

¹⁷ The trailer barcode on the back door and inside right and left walls of the trailer.

¹⁸ Surface Visibility 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.

¹⁹ *United States Postal Service Standard Operating Procedure - Subject: Trailer Scans at the Delivery Units (DU)*.

Finding #4 Arrow Keys

What We Found

Management did not properly manage and safeguard arrow keys.²⁰ On the morning of August 16, 2022, we entered the unit when it opened and noticed that the [REDACTED] containing the arrow keys was open. We subsequently reviewed the unit's inventory log for arrow keys and conducted a physical inventory of keys at the unit. Unit management did not have updated arrow keys inventory logs. We found that 17 of the 60 keys at the unit were not listed on the inventory log. In addition, employees did not secure arrow keys, keeping them inside a [REDACTED] that was left open and unattended throughout our visit and carriers were not signing a daily log to acknowledge the acceptance and return of their assigned keys.

Why Did It Occur

These conditions occurred due to insufficient management oversight. The manager did not have a procedure in place to control the daily distribution and semiannual survey of the keys. For the return of the keys, the manager relied on the PM supervisor to verify that all keys are accounted for, to lock the [REDACTED], and to send a photo of the [REDACTED] to the station manager each night. However, the manager did not ensure that this was being done consistently.

What Should Have Happened

Unit management should have ensured that employees were properly following arrow keys security procedures. According to Postal Service policy,²¹ management must keep an accurate inventory of all keys and conduct a semiannual physical survey of all building keys and immediately report missing keys to the U.S. Postal Inspection Service. In addition, policy²² states that management must secure arrow keys until they individually assign them 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 that 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 are used to open mail receptacles, lost or misplaced keys could impact mail delivery.

²⁰ Arrow keys are used by carriers to open mail receptacles, such as collection boxes and apartment mailboxes and are considered accountable items subject to strict controls.

²¹ *Administrative Support Manual Issue 13*, Sections 273.461, 273.464, and 273.471, July 1999, updated through March 31, 2022.

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

Finding #5: Property Conditions

What We Found

We found safety and maintenance issues at the Belleville Annex, including no annual fire extinguisher inspections since 2020 (see Figure 2), an unsecured ladder, and restrooms with damaged walls and inoperable fixtures (see Figure 3). These deficiencies were also reported in the *Belleville FY 22 Semiannual Safety Health & Fire Inspection Report* compiled on July 12, 2022. Unit management requested maintenance assistance on July 13, 2022, but stated that maintenance personnel did not abate all deficiencies noted in the report. In addition, there were excessive amounts of rubber bands scattered throughout the postal vehicle parking lot.

Why Did It Occur

Unit management did not take the necessary actions to ensure that property condition issues were corrected timely. The manager requested maintenance assistance on July 13, 2022, but overlooked the needed follow-up when maintenance personnel stopped coming.

What Should Have Happened

Unit management should have provided sufficient oversight to personnel responsible for maintaining facilities, reported safety and maintenance issues as they arose, and followed up on completion. The Postal Service is required to maintain a safe environment for employees and customers. In addition, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires employers to provide a safe and healthy workplace free of recognized hazards.²³

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

Management's attention to safety and maintenance deficiencies can reduce the risk of injuries to employees and customers; reduce related costs, such as workers' compensation claims, lawsuits, and OSHA penalties; and enhance the customer experience and Postal Service brand.

Management's Comments

Management agreed with all findings in the report. See [Appendix B](#) for management's comments in their entirety.

Figure 2. Fire Extinguisher Missing Annual Inspection



Source: OIG photo taken August 17, 2022.

Figure 3. Damaged Wall in Men's Bathroom and Inoperable Fixture in Women's Bathroom



Source: OIG photos taken August 17, 2022.

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

Appendix A: Additional Information

We conducted this audit from August through October 2022 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 relied on computer-generated data from the PTR, DCV, the Surface Visibility database, and the electronic Facilities Management System.²⁴ Although we did not test the validity of the controls over these systems, we assessed the accuracy of the data by reviewing existing information, comparing data from other sources, observing operations, and interviewing Postal Service officials knowledgeable about the data. We determined the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

²⁴ A custom-built Postal Service system used to manage work orders, contracts, and payments for facility construction, repairs, and alteration contracts, along with real estate contracts.

Appendix B: Management's Comments



October 12, 2022

JOHN CIHOTA
DIRECTOR, AUDIT SERVICES

SUBJECT: Management Response: Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property
Conditions Review – Belleville Annex, Belleville, NJ (Report Number 22-
170-1-DRAFT)

Thank you for providing the Postal Service an opportunity to review and comment on the findings and recommendations contained in the draft audit report, *Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review – Belleville Annex, Belleville, NJ*.

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

Management has completed implementation of actions plans that address delayed mail, package scanning, truck arrival scanning, and arrow keys. Supporting documentation was provided to the OIG as evidence of implementation. Three of the four property conditions sited in the report have been abated and images provided as proof of abatement. Steps have begun to address the one remaining property condition.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael P. Deighan".

Michael P. Deighan
Manager, New Jersey District

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

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