Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review – Princeton Branch, Homestead, FL

AUDIT REPORT

OFFICE OF
INSPECTOR
GENERAL
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

United States Post Office
Princeton Branch, Homestead Florida 33032

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

April 10, 2023

MEMORANDUM FOR: MICHAEL V. VECCHITTO
ACTING MANAGER, FLORIDA 3 DISTRICT

FROM: Joe Wolski
Director, Field Operations

SUBJECT: Audit Report – Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review – Princeton Branch, Homestead, FL (Report Number 23-050-4-R23)

This report presents the results of our audit of Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review – Princeton Branch, Homestead, FL.

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

Attachment

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

Results

Background

This interim report presents the results of our self-initiated audit of mail delivery, customer service, and property conditions at the Princeton Branch in Homestead, FL (Project Number 23-050-4). The Princeton Branch is in the Florida 3 District of the Southern Area and services ZIP Codes 33031, 33032, and 33039. These ZIP Codes serve about 42,137 people in a predominantly urban area.[1] This delivery unit has 14 rural routes and 11 city routes. We judgmentally selected the Princeton Branch based on the number of Customer 360[2] and Informed Delivery[3] contacts associated with the unit, and Stop-the-Clock (STC)[4] scans performed at the unit.

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

Our objective was to evaluate mail delivery, customer service, and property conditions at the Princeton Branch in Homestead, FL.

To accomplish our objective, we focused on five audit areas: delayed mail, package scanning, truck arrival scans, arrow keys,[5] 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.[6] During our site visit January 31 through February 2, 2023, we reviewed mail conditions; package and truck arrival scanning procedures; arrow key security procedures; and unit safety, security, and maintenance conditions. We also analyzed the scan status of mailpieces at the carrier cases and in the "Notice Left" area[7] and interviewed unit management and employees. We discussed our observations and conclusions as summarized in Table 1 with management on March 22, 2023, and included their comments where appropriate.

The Princeton Branch is one of four delivery units[8] the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) reviewed during the week of January 30, 2023 that are serviced by the Miami Processing and Distribution Center. We are issuing this interim report to provide the Postal Service with timely information regarding conditions we identified at the Princeton Branch. We will issue a separate report[9] that provides the Postal Service with the overall findings and recommendations for all four 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 Princeton Branch. Specifically, we found issues with all five of the areas we reviewed (see Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of Results

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

Source: Results of our fieldwork during the week of January 30, 2023.

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1   We obtained ZIP Code information related to population and urban/rural classification from Esri, which is based on 2010 Census Bureau information. Of the people living in these ZIP Codes, 38,718 (92 percent) are considered urban and 3,419 (8 percent) are considered living in rural communities. The unit also services ZIP Code 33092, which is used for PO Boxes and business customers.
2   A cloud-based application which enables Postal Service employees to diagnose, resolve, and track customer inquiries.
3   Informed Delivery is a free and optional notification service that gives residential customers the ability to digitally preview their letter-sized mail and submit inquiries for mailpieces that were expected for delivery but have not arrived.
4   A scan event that indicates the Postal Service has completed its commitment to deliver or attempt to deliver the mail piece. Examples of STC scans include "Delivered", "Available for Pick-up", and "No Access".
5   A distinctively shaped key carriers use to open mail-receiving receptacles such as street collection boxes and panels of apartment house mailboxes equipped with an arrow lock. Arrow keys are accountable property and are subject to strict controls.
6   Time of day that clerks have completed distributing mail to the carrier routes.
7   The area of a delivery unit where letters or packages that the carriers were unable to deliver are stored for customer pickup.
8   The other three units were the Allapattah Station, Miami, FL (Project Number 23-050-1); the Doral Branch, Doral, FL (Project Number 23-050-2); and the Flagler Station, Miami, FL (Project Number 23-050-3).
9   Project Number 22-050.

Finding #1: Delayed Mail

What We Found

On the morning of January 31, 2023, we identified about 1,855 delayed mail pieces at the unit. Specifically, we identified about 689 pieces in 11 carrier cases and about 1,166 pieces in the hot case[10] area. In addition, this mail was not reported as undelivered in the Delivery Condition Visualization (DCV)[11] system. See Table 2 for the number of pieces for each mail type and Figures 1 and 2 for examples of delayed mail found.

Table 2. Type of Delayed Mail

Type of Mail	OIG Estimated Count of Delayed Mail
Letters	1,605
Flats	250
Totals	**1,855**

Source: OIG count of delayed mail pieces identified during our visit January 31, 2023.

Why Did It Occur

Management stated delayed mail was due to missent[12] mail arriving after carriers left for street operations. The PM supervisor stated that competing responsibilities such as training a replacement supervisor prevented them from monitoring and verifying that all mail was cleared from the unit and taken to the street for delivery. In addition, management did not recognize missent mail as delayed, therefore they did not report it in the DCV system.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have made sure that all mail would be delivered on the day it was committed for delivery and reported any remaining delayed mail in the DCV system. Postal Service policy[13] states that all types of First-Class Mail, Priority Mail, and Priority Express Mail are always committed for delivery on the day of receipt. In addition, managers are required[14] to report all mail in the delivery unit after the carriers have left for their street duties as either delayed or curtailed in the DCV system. Further, management must update the DCV system if volumes have changed prior to the end of the business day.

Figure 1. Delayed Mail in Hot Case

Source: OIG photo taken on January 31, 2023.

Figure 2. Example of Delayed Mail in the Carrier Case

Source: OIG photo taken on January 31, 2023.

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10 A case designated for final withdrawal of mail as carriers leave the office.
11 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.
12 Missent mail is mail that was sorted to the wrong delivery unit, station, or branch and has a barcode or ZIP Code for another office
13 *Committed Mail & Color Code Policy for Marketing Mail* stand-up talk, February 2019.
14 *Informed Visibility Delivery Condition Visualization User Guide*, September 2022.

MAIL DELIVERY, CUSTOMER SERVICE, AND PROPERTY CONDITIONS REVIEW – PRINCETON BRANCH, HOMESTEAD, FL
REPORT NUMBER 23-050-4-R23

3

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

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

MAIL DELIVERY, CUSTOMER SERVICE, AND PROPERTY CONDITIONS REVIEW – PRINCETON BRANCH, HOMESTEAD, FL
REPORT NUMBER 23-050-4-R23

4

Finding #2: Package Scanning

What We Found

Employees improperly scanned packages at the delivery unit. In total, employees scanned 404 packages at the delivery unit between October and December 2022 (see Table 3). Further analysis of the STC scan data for these packages showed that 70 percent of them were scanned as "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.

Table 3. STC Scans at Delivery Unit

STC Scan Type	Count	Percentage
Delivered	283	70.05%
Receptacle Full / Item Oversized	81	20.05%
No Secure Location Available	19	4.70%
Delivery Attempted – No Access to Delivery Location	11	2.72%
Delivery Exception – Animal Interference	8	1.98%
Refused	1	0.25%
No Authorized Recipient	1	0.25%
Total	**404**	**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.

However, we found 242 of the 283 (85.51 percent) "Delivered" scans at the unit were properly made for packages on two routes that have cluster boxes at the delivery unit. Customers then pick up their mail from the boxes.

In addition, on the morning of January 31, 2023, before carriers arrived for the day, we selected 57 packages[15] to review and analyze scanning and tracking history.

Of the 57 sampled packages, 26 (45.61 percent) had missing or improper scans, including:

- Seventeen (12 from the carrier cases and five from the "Notice Left" area) were missing STC Scans to let the customer know the reason for non-delivery.

- Five for the same address that could not be explained. The packages were subsequently delivered that afternoon.

  - Two were scanned "Delivery Attempted – No Access to Delivery Location" that were scanned 13 days prior to our review.

  - Two were scanned "Held at Post Office at Customer Request" that were scanned 11 and 12 days prior to our review.

  - One was scanned "Return to Sender' three days prior to our review and should have been returned.

- Two from the carrier cases were scanned "Held at Post Office at Customer Request" but were not scanned at the unit.

- One from the carrier cases was scanned "Delivery Attempted – No Access to Delivery Location" but was not scanned at the delivery point.

- One from the "Notice Left" area was scanned "Delivered", which should only be performed when a package is successfully left at the customer's delivery address.

In addition, 11 of the 57 (19.30 percent) had handling issues:

- Three from the carrier cases were scanned "Insufficient Address" and should have been returned to sender.

- Eight packages in the "Notice Left" area were not returned to the sender, as required.[16] These packages ranged from 11 to 101 days past the return dates.

Why Did It Occur

These scanning issues occurred because unit management did not adequately monitor and enforce proper package scanning and handling procedures. For example, management was unaware

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15 We reviewed all 27 packages from the carrier cases and judgmentally selected 30 packages from the "Notice Left" area.
16 *Notice Left and Return Guidelines*, dated July 2007, states that domestic packages should be returned to sender on the 15th calendar day after a notice is left and international packages should be returned to sender on the 30th calendar day after a notice is left.

of the improper handling and scanning of packages found at the carrier cases. The PM supervisor stated that competing responsibilities such as training a replacement supervisor prevented them from monitoring mail brought back by carriers.

Further, management stated they were unaware of the overdue "Notice Left" packages. Unit employees indicated there was no specific person assigned to review the Notice Left section.

What Should Have Happened

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

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17 *Delivery Done Right the First Time* stand-up talk, March 2020.
18 *Carriers Delivering the Customer Experience* stand-up talk, July 2017.

MAIL DELIVERY, CUSTOMER SERVICE, AND PROPERTY CONDITIONS REVIEW – PRINCETON BRANCH, HOMESTEAD, FL
REPORT NUMBER 23-050-4-R23

6

Finding #3: Truck Arrival Scanning

What We Found

Employees at the Princeton Branch did not scan all incoming trailer/truck barcodes[19] as required. We reviewed data related to morning truck arrival scans from October 1 to December 31, 2022 and found that employees did not perform a scan for 140 of 246 (56.91 percent) scheduled truck arrivals (see Table 4). During our site visit on January 31, 2023, we observed an employee at the unit make the required scans for two inbound mail trucks.

Table 4. Truck Arrival Scans from October 1 through December 31, 2022

Month	Count of Inbound Trips	Count of Missed Scans	Percentage Missing
October	82	48	58.54%
November	75	38	50.67%
December	89	54	60.67%
Total	**246**	**140**	**56.91%**

Source: OIG analysis of data extracted from the Postal Service's Surface Visibility Web (SVWeb) System. SVWeb collects end-to-end data by linking multiple scans of a single asset to create visibility data to support planning, management, and optimization of the surface network.

Why Did It Occur

Management did not monitor scan performance data to verify that all trucks received an arrival scan because they were not aware of the report that could be used for monitoring the scans. During our interviews, the AM supervisor stated that he had been confident that the clerks were performing the scans and relied on them to tell him if there was a problem.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have performed reviews of truck arrival tracking reports to verify that employees were performing all expected truck scans. They should also have instructed employees to perform appropriate trailer/truck barcodes scans and enforced the requirement. According to Postal Service policy,[20] employees must scan the trailer barcode on Postal Service trailer/trucks and Highway Contract Route trucks arriving at the delivery unit during local operating hours.

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

When employees do not scan the truck barcode, the Postal Service does not receive timely transportation information and is unable to address issues that may be causing mail delays, which could affect customer service.

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

MAIL DELIVERY, CUSTOMER SERVICE, AND PROPERTY CONDITIONS REVIEW – PRINCETON BRANCH, HOMESTEAD, FL
REPORT NUMBER 23-050-4-R23

7

Finding #4: Arrow Keys

What We Found

Unit management did not properly manage arrow keys. On the morning of January 31, 2023, we reviewed the unit's inventory log for arrow keys and conducted a physical inventory of keys at the unit. We found eight of the 27 keys located at the unit were not listed on the inventory log and five keys listed on the inventory log could not be located. Unit management had not reported any of the missing keys to the U.S. Postal Inspection Service.

We found that arrow keys were kept secure. We also observed the carriers sign out their keys on the inventory log in the morning and returned them to the PM supervisor upon return to the office. The keys were housed in a cart that was kept locked in the safe room overnight and moved to the ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ when carriers arrived for the day.

Why Did It Occur

Management did not have proper oversight of the arrow key inventory. Specifically, management stated that the unit used an old inventory log and was unsure when it was last updated prior to our visit. In addition, unit management indicated they were unaware of the process for reporting lost or damaged arrow keys.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have verified that arrow key security procedures were properly followed. According to Postal Service policy,[21] management must keep an accurate inventory of all keys and conduct a semiannual physical survey of all building keys; missing keys must be immediately reported to the U.S. Postal Inspection Service.

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

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

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21   Administrative Support Manual Issue 13, Sections 273.461, 273.464, and 273.471, July 1999 – updated through March 31, 2022.
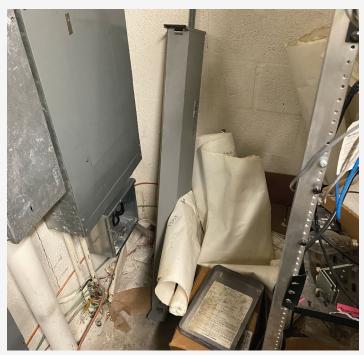
Finding # 5: Property Conditions

What We Found

We found safety, security, and maintenance issues at the Princeton Branch including:

- A blocked electrical panel (see Figure 3).
- An unmarked exit.
- Two blocked internal Postal Inspection Service doors.
- Missing monthly fire extinguisher inspections.
- Non-working dock lights (see Figure 4).
- No signage posted around the facility stating that employee vehicles may be subject to search.
- Trash and dirt on the lobby floor.
- Dirty and scratched walls in the workroom.
- Missing and damaged ceiling tiles and dirty air vents in the workroom (see Figure 5).
- Dirty landscaping wall in front of the facility.

Figure 3. Blocked Electrical Panel

Source: OIG photo taken February 2, 2023

Figure 4. Non-working Dock Lights

Source: OIG photo taken February 1, 2023.

Why Did It Occur

Management did not take the necessary actions to verify that facility condition issues were corrected because they were unaware of some issues, such as the dirty lobby floor; and unaware of some requirements, such as employee parking lot signage. Also, unit management stated they were waiting for the completion of the building addition which will allow them to clear space in the delivery unit to perform repairs. Further, the unit had been without a custodian for the two weeks prior to our visit.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have provided sufficient oversight of personnel responsible for maintaining facilities, reported safety and maintenance issues as they arose, and followed up for completion. The Postal Service is required to maintain a safe environment for employees and customers. In addition, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires employers to provide a safe and healthy workplace free of recognized hazards.[22]

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

MAIL DELIVERY, CUSTOMER SERVICE, AND PROPERTY CONDITIONS REVIEW – PRINCETON BRANCH, HOMESTEAD, FL
REPORT NUMBER 23-050-4-R23

9

Figure 5. Damaged, Missing, and Stained Ceiling Tiles and Dirty Air Vents

Source: OIG photos taken February 2, 2023.

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

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

Management Actions

During our audit, management took corrective action to unblock the Postal Inspection Service doors.

Management's Comments

Management agreed with all findings in the report.

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

Appendix A: Additional Information

We conducted this audit from January through April 2023 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards and included such tests of internal controls as we considered necessary under the circumstances. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective.

We assessed the reliability of PTR, DCV, Surface Visibility Web,[23] and electronic Facilities Management System[24] data by reviewing existing information, comparing data from other sources, observing operations, and interviewing Postal Service officials knowledgeable about the data. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

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23 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.
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

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

March 29, 2023

JOHN CIHOTA
DIRECTOR, AUDIT OPERATIONS

SUBJECT: Management Response - Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review – Princeton Branch, Homestead, FL (Project Number 23-050-4-DRAFT)

Thank you for providing the Postal Service with an opportunity to review and comment on the findings contained in the draft audit report, *Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review – Princeton Branch, Homestead, FL.*

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

Management has begun taking steps to address the five findings.

Delayed Mail: A standard operating procedure and standard work instructions are already established. Local management will be retrained on how to properly identify, and record delayed and curtailed mail.

Package Scanning: Management will retrain applicable employees on the standard operating procedure for properly scanning and handling packages. Management will conduct daily reviews to ensure compliance.

Truck Arrival Scanning: Management will retrain applicable personnel on the standard operating procedure for scanning and recording trip arrival times and review the daily trip arrival log for compliance.

Arrow Keys: Management at the Princeton Branch will adhere to the standard operating procedure for Arrow Key management including updating key logs and reporting missing arrow keys to the US Postal Inspection Service.

MAIL DELIVERY, CUSTOMER SERVICE, AND PROPERTY CONDITIONS REVIEW – PRINCETON BRANCH, HOMESTEAD, FL
REPORT NUMBER 23-050-4-R23

12

Property Conditions: Eight of the ten property conditions sited in the report have been fixed and pictures provided as verification. The remaining property conditions are part of the construction project for the new building addition.

E-SIGNED by Michael.V Vecchitto
on 2023-03-29 06:14:23 CDT

Michael Vecchitto
District Manager, Florida 3 District

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

Contact us via our Hotline and FOIA forms. Follow us on social networks. Stay informed.

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MAIL DELIVERY, CUSTOMER SERVICE, AND PROPERTY CONDITIONS REVIEW – PRINCETON BRANCH, HOMESTEAD, FL
REPORT NUMBER 23-050-4-R23

14