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## Details Emerge About COVID Test Distribution – But Not From the USPS

After getting “No Comment” as the answer from the Postal Service to even the most basic questions about the rumored use of postal carriers to distribute COVID test kits, details finally emerged on January 21 – not from the USPS, but in an article in *The Washington Post*.

### The task

Reporter Jacob Bogage framed the situation at the outset:

“The US Postal Service’s mission to deliver 500 million coronavirus test kits has cast it in an unprecedented role in the nation’s pandemic response just as COVID-19 infections have peaked within its own ranks and its network is under immense strain.

“Online orders began rolling in this week for the free rapid tests, which are scheduled to ship by the end of the month. The agency has hired thousands of seasonal workers and converted more than 40 facilities into *ad hoc* fulfillment centers in what experts have called the largest disaster-relief mobilization in its 247-year history.

“The stakes for the country – and Postal Service – could hardly be higher. Americans are still struggling to access at-home coronavirus tests as the omicron variant is driving caseloads near record highs in parts of the country. ...”

As Bogage noted, the task is far from easy, as even postal officials admitted privately:

“The program requires the agency to take on entirely new duties and a fresh public face in the fight against the coronavirus. Test-kit processing snags, IT failures or delivery issues could set the agency’s reputation back decades. ... ‘Even if you know how to do it, it’s never been done before. A lot can go wrong,’ said one senior postal official. ...

“Observers say the Postal Service is working furiously to retain seasonal employees for the campaign and reconfiguring its sprawling transportation network to handle the parcels. Agency leaders appear cautiously optimistic about the program, according to seven people directly involved with the effort, though worries persist about the wobbly postal IT system and rising workforce infections.

“Rank-and-file workers report enthusiasm for the project even as regional supervisors have yet to receive instructions on how local postal facilities will handle the tidal wave of incoming test packets.

### Logistics

The USPS is reportedly using resources originally acquired to handle package volume during the 2021-2022 peak shipping season. As the article stated:

“The agency has converted 43 package sorting plants launched during the holiday season to store and process the test kits, and extended the contracts of 8,000 seasonal employees to staff those sites, according to union officials. It plans to ship 2 million packages – each holding four test kits – every day. ...

“Postal workers will manage and track the inventory of tests. Agency engineers will oversee the customer ordering process, which generates mailing labels and postage for each package. Then postal staff will ‘pick and pack’ test kits into parcels, reminiscent of a private-sector e-commerce operation. ...

“The program requires accountability for each test kit, not just each mailed parcel. The software behind customers’ test-kit order form must integrate with operations from the 43 package annexes. And the Postal Service needs to extend commitments for trucking and freight air contractors to ensure tests are delivered in one to three days.”

The *Post* was able to determine that kits addressed to the 48 contiguous states will be sent by First-Class Package Service, while those to Alaska, Hawaii, and other offshore destinations, including overseas military and diplomatic personnel, will travel by Priority Mail. Postage costs will be reimbursed by the Department of Health and Human Services. (Even that fundamental information was not provided directly by the USPS despite repeated inquiries from industry groups.)

### Observations

Producing the article wasn’t as easy as making a phone call:

“This report is based on interviews with 32 current and former postal officials and agency employees, White House and union officials, and independent logistics and health experts. Many of them spoke on the condition of anonymity to give candid assessments of the administration’s and Postal Service’s preparedness for the test-kit shipment program.”

Now that details are known, the challenge is stark: a high-profile undertaking to not simply organize and move hundreds of millions of mailpieces, but get them to their intended recipients within anticipated timeframes. Success would burnish the Postal Service’s image, but any fumbling of the project would only add to existing doubts about the agency’s ability to provide timely service.

Either way, why the USPS was so tight-lipped about the assignment remains unexplained. The agency didn’t itself publicly reveal until January 24 (on its *Link*) what was already learned by some old-fashioned investigative reporting.

## USPS Remains Ambiguous About COVID Impact on Workforce

Many parts of the country continue to report waves of infection from the current Omicron COVID variant, and anecdotal reports from some areas suggest that the resulting level of absenteeism at Postal Service facilities is impacting the agency's operations. Nonetheless, when asked about the situation, the Postal Service is vague about national and local absenteeism, referring instead to the existence of unspecified "hot spots" where staffing levels may be problematic.

### Other sources

Meanwhile, various media reports reflect what the USPS isn't willing to disclose directly. For example, a January 17 report by Detroit's WXYZ stated that, after some recovery from earlier absenteeism levels,

"... some postal workers are warning another possible slowdown could occur. The reason? They say postal employees aren't being told when their coworkers are testing positive for COVID-19, allowing the virus to spread inside their facilities. The president of the American Postal Workers Union local claimed that 'postal workers are getting sick in record numbers, but often because they're not told if they were in close contact with a co-worker who tested positive for COVID-19.' The union official added that 'he's been emailing and calling managers for two weeks to ask about the lack of contact tracing but says no one has been answering questions,' adding that 'employees can't get through to supervisors to report positive COVID-19 cases.'"

Reports of delayed mail delivery and slow retail service have appeared elsewhere, usually accompanied by comments about the lack of information from the Postal Service.

In one such report, Cleveland's WOIO noted that calls to the USPS get a recording that states "The Postal Service is mindful of the fact that customers are in need of the timely delivery of mail ... ." A separate statement to the station by a postal spokesperson wasn't any more forthcoming:

"We appreciate the patience of our customers and the efforts of employees during challenging times. The Postal Service is committed to providing the best possible service to our customers and we apologize for any inconvenience that may have been experienced."

In the Knoxville (TN) area, *The Daily Times* reported long lines at the retail counter in Marysville (TN) and complaints from citizens about not receiving mail for protracted periods.

"Customer support for USPS responded to a complaint filed by [a citizen] on Dec. 3, stating employee availability due to COVID-19 quarantining had been impacting delivery. It added that USPS 'understands the importance of receiving first-class mail on time,' and they're working on finding additional resources to address the issues."

Milford (DE)'s *Milford Live* reported that several local residents "continue to report mail delays, some claiming they had not received mail for more than a week." Seeking a response from local postal officials, the reporter was told that

"The COVID-19 pandemic continues to present unprecedented challenges and occasionally impact employee availability. We also thank our customers for their understanding and continued support."

In Albany (NY), the *Times-Union* had a similar article about the absence of mail delivery:

"Upon walking in [to a local post office, a patron] found several of her neighbors inside the post office inquiring about the mail, too. And they were all told similar things by the postal workers.

"The office didn't have enough letter carriers to cover the routes because some had coronavirus and others were injured slipping on ice. ... 'I don't think they know what to say. It's not at the office and not out for delivery. We have no idea where our mail is.' [The patron] filed a complaint with the USPS. She received a generic email in return telling her the agency would look into it. She hasn't heard back yet. When asked about the missing mail and lack of deliveries, a USPS spokesperson told the *Times Union* last week employees were on every route making deliveries, which contrasts with what local postal workers have told residents and the steady stream of residents who have gone to the post office to retrieve missing mail."

Meanwhile, in one of its weekly PR boasts, the USPS claimed that "the average time to deliver a mailpiece across the postal network remained stable at 2.7 days between the period Jan. 1 and Jan 21," again reflecting the gap between what it wants customers to believe and what they experience themselves.

### High numbers

In a January 21 article, the *Washington Post* reported that "19,742 postal workers [were] in quarantine or isolation [as of January 20] after a positive test or exposure to the virus. It is the largest contingent to miss work since the pandemic began, according to the American Postal Workers Union."



The *Post* noted that local postal officials aren't getting consistent instructions about how to handle local outbreaks.

"Return-to-work guides circulated to supervisors and union officials and obtained by *The Washington Post* have caused more confusion. One guide, distributed Jan. 5, says employees who are staying home because they are symptomatic but have not tested positive for the virus can return upon satisfying three criteria. The document, however, lists only two succeeding items. Another guide, updated Jan. 16, instructs supervisors to conduct a 'verbal discussion with the employee' before referring their case to Postal Service occupational health nurse administrators. The guide specifically prohibits supervisors from taking 'any written notes' from these conversations."

When questioned about absenteeism, the Postal Service usually defers, claiming it cannot comment because of "privacy concerns." As noted by the *Post*, the agency further alleges that its "pandemic mitigation plans – which include social distancing when appropriate, a 'liberal' COVID-19 leave policy, distribution of personal protective equipment and more frequent facility cleanings – 'continue to perform well.'"

Yet again, the Postal Service's public pronouncements are at odds with what its customers are seeing, leaving it to them to reconcile the misalignment of postal PR and reality.

# Key Points in PRC Annual Report

Like most of the annual reports of government agencies, the Postal Regulatory Commission’s Fiscal Year 2021 *Annual Report to the President and Congress* contains background about the commission’s mission, membership, and organizational structure, and summaries of its activities and major proceedings over the period.

However, digging into the text of the 90-page document offers details that give some insights into the sole institution the PRC regulates – the Postal Service.

## Contracts

An example would be the commission’s FY 21 activity regarding negotiated service agreements filed by the USPS. Though the volume and revenue represented by each NSA can vary, the number that are presented for PRC approval is a general indicator of the Postal Service’s success in developing customer interest in its competitive products.

Table III-1: Competitive NSAs Approved by the Commission<sup>a</sup>  
FY 2016 through FY 2021

Competitive NSAs	FY 2021	FY 2020 <sup>b</sup>	FY 2019	FY 2018	FY 2017	FY 2016
Domestic	131	218	191	226	211	187
International	5	49	25	81	104	97
<b>Total</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>315</b>	<b>284</b>

<sup>a</sup> This table shows approved NSAs the Postal Service filed as new products or as functionally equivalent to the baseline agreement of existing products. This table does not include NSA modifications or amendments.  
<sup>b</sup> FY 2020 totals differ from those reported in the FY 2020 Annual Report because 8 international mail NSAs were inadvertently categorized as domestic. See FY 2020 Annual Report at 32.

Accordingly, what the PRC reported for FY 21 indicates a level of NSA activity that’s far from what it should be if, as the USPS asserts, it’s a major player in the package and shipping sector. Though NSA filings in 2020 rebounded from the decrease in 2019, that gain was sharply reversed by a drop of nearly 50% in 2021.

Table III-2: Non-Published Rate Contracts Implemented by the Postal Service  
FY 2016 through FY 2021

Non-Published Rate	FY 2021	FY 2020	FY 2019	FY 2018	FY 2017	FY 2016
Global Expedited Package Services Non-Published Rates 1-15	159	380	326	474	393	244
Priority Mail – Non-Published Rates 1 and 2	120	125	116	145	121	207
<b>Total</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>505</b>	<b>442</b>	<b>619</b>	<b>514</b>	<b>451</b>

Source: Postal Regulatory Commission, Negotiated Service Agreements (NSAs) Statistics October 2021 Update, available at <https://www.prc.gov/sites/default/files/October%20NSA%20Monthly%20Summary%202021.pdf>.

A similar pattern was reported in non-published rate contracts that include international shipping agreements. There, too, after an uptick from 2019 to 2020, 2021 saw a drop of about 45% from 2020, again not reflective of the growth that a would-be competitor should be experiencing.

## The USO and the monopolies

Another element of the PRC’s annual reports is its valuations of the Postal Service’s Universal Service Obligation and monopolies.

The PRC noted that it has three ongoing public inquiry cases. One, initiated on October 1, 2019, is intended “to evaluate the methodology for estimating the value of the postal and mailbox monopolies.” The second, opened on December 20, 2020, considers “potential changes to the Commission’s methodology for estimating the cost of the Universal Service Obligation.” The third, begun on July 2, 2021, is “to determine whether the Commission needs to promulgate regulations to implement statutory exemptions to the letter

monopoly.” Though those cases are ongoing, The PRC nonetheless provided its estimates.

Table IV-1: Estimated USO Cost (\$ Billions)

	FY 2020	FY 2019	FY 2018	FY 2017	FY 2016
Postal Services to Areas of the Nation the Postal Service Would Not Otherwise Serve	0.77	0.76	0.71	0.67	0.62
Estimated Revenue Not Received Due to Free or Reduced Rates	1.96	1.89	1.79	1.71	1.64
Other Public Services or Activities <sup>a</sup>	3.17	3.13	2.92	2.36	2.37
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5.90</b>	<b>5.78</b>	<b>5.41</b>	<b>4.74</b>	<b>4.63</b>

Table IV-2: Estimated Costs of Providing Postal Services to Areas of the Nation the Postal Service Would Not Otherwise Serve (\$ Millions)

	FY 2020	FY 2019	FY 2018	FY 2017	FY 2016
Maintaining Small Post Offices <sup>a</sup>	610	590	551	526	470
Alaska Air Subsidy	136	135	120	114	113
Group E Post Office Boxes	20	35	35	34	34
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>765</b>	<b>759</b>	<b>706</b>	<b>675</b>	<b>616</b>

Table IV-3: Estimated Cost Savings from Closing CAG K and L Post Offices  
Derivation of Updated Costs of Maintaining Small Post Offices (\$ Millions)

Select CAG K and L Post Offices Annual Operating Costs	FY 2020	FY 2019	FY 2018	FY 2017	FY 2016
CAG K and L Postmasters <sup>a</sup>	73	71	67	64	93
Postmaster Relief/Leave Replacements	20	20	22	21	29
Clerks <sup>b</sup>	629	607	564	543	447
<b>Total Potential Operating Costs Saved (If CAG K and L Post Offices Closed)</b>	<b>722</b>	<b>698</b>	<b>654</b>	<b>627</b>	<b>569</b>
<b>Cost Savings Adjustment<sup>c</sup></b>	<b>FY Cost Savings Adjustments</b>				
Rural Carrier Now Provides Retail Services Cost <sup>d</sup>	13	10	8	8	8
Rural Carrier Now Provides Delivery Service Cost <sup>d</sup>	52	51	49	49	48
Post Office Boxes Revenue Foregone <sup>e</sup>	47	47	45	44	42
<b>Total FY Cost Savings Adjustment</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>Cost of Maintaining Small Post Offices (Potential Operating Costs Saved Less Cost Savings Adjustments)</b>	<b>610</b>	<b>590</b>	<b>551</b>	<b>526</b>	<b>470</b>

Table IV-4: Estimated Revenue Not Received Due to Free or Reduced Rates (\$ Millions)

	FY 2020	FY 2019	FY 2018	FY 2017	FY 2016
Preferred Rate Discounts Net of Costs <sup>a</sup>	1,189	1,223	1,172	1,104	1,105
Periodicals Losses	775	671	614	608	536
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,964</b>	<b>1,895</b>	<b>1,786</b>	<b>1,712</b>	<b>1,641</b>

Table IV-5: Other Public Services or Activities the Postal Service Would Not Provide But for Legal Requirements (\$ Millions)<sup>458</sup>

Public Service or Activity	FY 2020	FY 2019	FY 2018	FY 2017	FY 2016
Six-Day Delivery	2,518	2,465	2,259	2,204	2,191
Uniform First-Class Mail Rates	52	71	99	52	78
Uniform Media Mail/Library Mail Rates	94	124	97	99	102
Postal Inspection Service (Net Cost) <sup>b</sup>	503	471	462	N/A	N/A
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,167</b>	<b>3,131</b>	<b>2,916</b>	<b>2,355</b>	<b>2,371</b>

The PRC also estimated the value of the USPS monopolies.

Table IV-6: Base Case Model Values of the Postal and Mailbox Monopolies (\$ Billions)<sup>478</sup>

	FY 2020 <sup>a</sup>	FY 2019 <sup>a</sup>	FY 2018 <sup>a</sup>	FY 2017	FY 2016
Postal Monopoly	3.82	4.72	4.53	5.34	5.68
Mailbox Monopoly	0.86	0.94	1.03	1.35	1.24

Some basic math suggests that eliminating both the USO and monopolies would benefit the USPS financially. Though the PRC estimates the monopolies were worth \$4.68 billion in FY 2020 (the estimates are always a year behind), about \$1 billion less than in FY 2019, the USO costs in FY 2020 were up from FY 2019, to \$5.90 billion. Of course, despite occasional calls to end the monopolies, there’s no chance that the USPS would ever be relieved of any of the USO. Despite the USO being a public service mandate, it’s similarly unlikely that, Congress would ever appropriate money to support its costs.

## Frustrations in International Mail – *Commentary*

*This article was produced by Merry Law, Mailers Hub's expert consultant on international mail. Merry may be reached at MLaw@WorldVu.com.*

I recently wrote two articles for this newsletter on what's happening in the international mail arena at the Universal Postal Union and at the USPS. While I try to present facts and developments in a neutral way, those reading between the lines might conclude correctly I am not optimistic about the immediate future for the international mail environment.

Here is my opinion: unless there is progress at the UPU for the international network and at the USPS for our own inbound and outbound mail, we face a spiral of deteriorating international postal service affecting US mailers, e-retailers, and consumers.

### **The Postal Service**

For the USPS, international mail generates more than twice the revenue of Periodicals with less than one-fifth the volume of pieces (I do understand there are important current and historical reasons for emphasis on Periodicals) but international revenue is only 3.3% of the USPS's total in FY 2021.

So, international mail receives comparatively little attention from the USPS, with responsibilities split between three different functional units and another handling international relations. Many of the USPS staff, including senior management in these units, do not have a great deal of experience or familiarity with international business, although some are experienced in this area.

USPS is working on its own "Duty and Delivery Paid" solution for outbound goods mailed to other countries. Usually termed Duty Delivery Paid or DDP, this would allow the sender to pay the duty, an advantage for B2C companies that has long been available from non-postal carriers.

USPS did not subscribe to the International Post Corporation (IPC) DDP solution, made available to postal operators for a fee. USPS is apparently working to get its own tested and available as soon as possible. Nothing has been announced publicly or at MTAC or any other forum as far as I can determine. Input by and testing with mailers and mail service providers would generate ideas and feedback for a successful solution. Hopefully, it will work better than the dysfunctional online customs form, which hasn't worked consistently for more than two years.

### **The UPU**

At the same time, the UPU is moving very slowly on a number of things -- including administrative reform and rule-making for Advance Electronic Data -- creating annoyance, impatience, irritation, and frustration among UPU representatives, postal operators, and other interested parties.

Meetings are on a fixed schedule (often quarterly) and submissions must be made well in advance with some requirements for pre-clearance by a body of "experts." The expert panels are appointed by their countries from their postal operators or their government. Expertise may take a back seat to political or parochial interests.

The US representative at the UPU was changed by the US Congress in 1998 from the USPS to the Department of State, but USPS staff provide expertise and represent the US in some UPU committees and working groups.

Some USPS staff are seen as slow-walking some of the needed items to create new and updated standards at the UPU. Changes to standards are needed to implement consistent and comprehensive regulations for AED, required by the US, the EU, and other countries for the safety and security of imports.

The perception among some here and abroad is that USPS staff's prime goal is preserving the postal operators' prerogatives and protections, creating the bare minimum for postal AED to meet the requirements of the US and EU countries, and opposing anything that's not to the USPS's advantage, even if it's neutral. Whether this is a fair assessment or not, it undermines the perception and the reputation of the US.

### **Data**

Currently, postal operators are not legally responsible for the accuracy of the customs information or the contents of packages and can't be fined or prosecuted by other countries, unlike private delivery services and carriers.

For inbound postal matter, this has presented a conundrum for Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and USPS. Senators are again annoyed about the lack of compliance with the STOP Act. (See <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/agency-oversight/2021/12/senators-warn-usps-cbp-fall-short-on-legislation-to-stop-opioids-in-the-mail/> for a recent expression of concern.)

The USPS has consistently objected to stronger actions against foreign postal operators, citing ambiguous language in the UPU Acts. Is there potential for foreign action against USPS? Definitely, but how much and how should that weigh against the US inbound potential harm?

There is tension between CPB and USPS on STOP Act enforcement, based on occasional comments those in the international space have heard. (There are also unanswered questions about how and how much AED is used by CBP, with some estimates as low as 1%-5%.)

### **Reform**

UPU reform is again on the table. The UPU opening its membership to a broader group has been an on-and-off discussion.

Governmental and operational functions at the UPU are not separated. That was fine when posts were governmental agencies, but, in most developed countries and some developing countries, posts are no longer exclusively government owned and competition is allowed. Because of this, separating the governmental and operational functions of the UPU is important.

The issue is becoming more imperative, but is very divisive. After more than five years of discussions, a task force is being formed, with the US as one co-chair. The meeting creating the task force became so antagonistic that Kenya withdrew its nomination as co-chair.

Overall, this is the tensest time I've seen in both the UPU and in the USPS international area. That hostility between the USPS staff and the industry participants was lower at the January MTAC meeting was positive, but that's a meager step given their divergence of opinion on a host of issues.

I am not optimistic about the future of the USPS or the UPU. Without reform, the UPU will become increasingly irrelevant. I'm sure you have your own thoughts on USPS's future.

We all need to step up. We are all part of this larger economic sector. Engaging with USPS, through MTAC or through other public meetings or any other contacts with USPS, should encourage non-hostile dialogue. We, the public, can make our opinions on opening the UPU known to the State Department through the Advisory Committee on International Postal and Delivery Services.

Ratepayers and commercial mail producers need to make their needs and opinions known. Here are some ways to start:

<https://www.apa.org/advocacy/guide/letter-email>

How to write your US Representatives and Senators who are considering legislation on postal reform and providing additional funds to USPS. (From the American Psychological Association, it's the most complete I have seen and good advice for writing to influence other governmental groups.)

<https://www.prc.gov/contact>

Send comments to the Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC) on "how the Commission can do a better job."

And let Mailers Hub and other groups you belong to know your opinions as well.

## OIG Examines USPS Providing Vehicles for Rural Routes

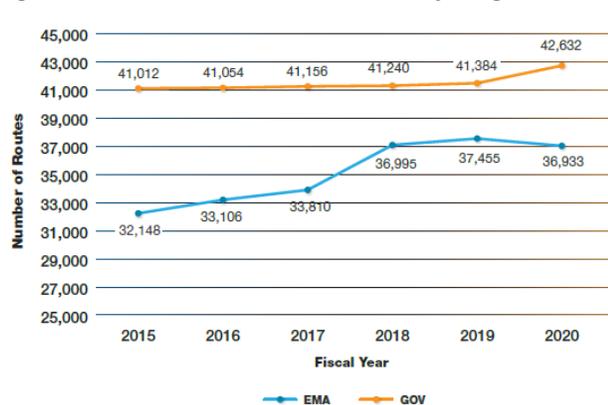
For customers living outside of cities and towns – where postal delivery typically is by city letter carriers – the sight of rural carriers making the rounds in their own cars or trucks is common. Driving their left-hand drive vehicles from the passenger seat – so they can reach mailboxes – is a necessary skill for rural carriers who don't have ones that were specially-ordered with right-hand drive.

As suburbs continue to spread into once rural areas, new delivery routes that are added often are rural routes, but in those cases residents may see the rural carrier driving a postal truck – usually an aged LLV – rather than a private car.

The Postal Service reimburses rural carriers for the use of their own vehicles but, in some cases, it makes more sense financially for the USPS to provide a vehicle. That agency practice was the subject of an audit by the USPS Office of Inspector General, reported on January 18 (*Replacement of Privately Owned Delivery Vehicles*). As the OIG explained:

"In FY 2020, the Postal Service had about 133,000 rural letter carriers and associates delivering mail on over 79,500 rural routes. A rural route can either be designated as a GOV [government-owned vehicle] route where the Postal Service provides the vehicle, or an EMA [equipment maintenance allowance] route where the carrier provides the vehicle. There were more than 36,900 EMA routes where a rural carrier was responsible for the provision and maintenance of the delivery vehicle and received fuel and maintenance reimbursement through the EMA program.

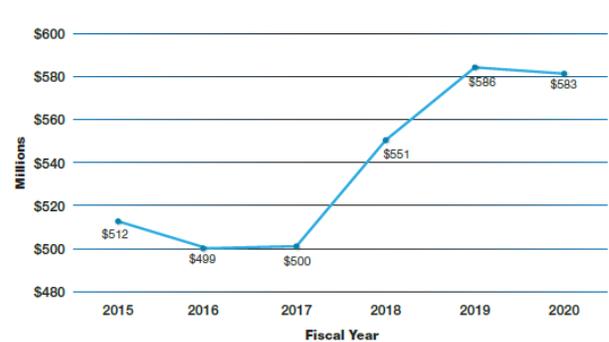
Figure 2. FY 2015 – FY 2020 Rural Route Totals by Designation



Source: Rural Route Master List, RMSS.

"The Postal Service paid rural letter carriers almost \$583 million for EMA routes in FY 2020. By the end of FY 2021, the Postal Service had reduced the annual EMA payment total to \$560 million for over 36,600 routes. For use of their privately owned vehicles, the Postal Service paid rural letter carriers an average of over \$15,700 per EMA route. The EMA program's costs have increased by a total of nearly \$71 million since FY 2015 (an increase of over 13%) and the program is governed by an agreement between the Postal Service and the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association (NRCLA).

Figure 3. FY 2015 – FY 2020 Actual EMA Payment Totals Nationwide (in Dollars)



Source: Enterprise Data Warehouse (EDW), Accounting Data Mart (ADM).

"In calendar year 2019, Postal Service Headquarters' Fleet Management acquired over 13,200 right-hand drive commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) vehicles through the DAR process to strategically convert some existing EMA routes to GOV routes between FY 2020 and FY 2022. The executive-level Investment Review Committee (IRC) approved acquisition of these vehicles for rural routes under the EMA Phase 1 DAR for \$506.9 million. The DAR estimated this purchase would result in an EMA savings of about \$888 million over six years. While the estimated savings from procuring these vehicles aligned with a projected October 2019 contract start, the actual award date was March 2020 – just before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic – which impacted the number of vehicles delivered in FY 2020.

"The Postal Service intended for the acquisition to reduce EMA costs, reduce safety and ergonomic risks to carriers, increase brand representation, and improve hiring and retention of rural carriers. ..."

### Findings

The OIG found that the replacement strategy didn't work financially in all cases.

**“EMA Route Conversions Did Not Maximize Cost Savings.** The Postal Service did not maximize cost savings related to EMA route conversions in two primary ways: they did not implement conversions timely, causing EMA payments to last longer than anticipated, and they did not always correctly prioritize EMA route conversions. This occurred due to a lack of written guidance from headquarters and lack of a nationwide tool or report to promptly identify timeliness issues.

“... At the start of the conversion process, headquarters issued general guidance regarding the expected deployment timeframe. Specifically, in August 2020, Fleet Management instructed VMFs to deploy the vehicles as soon as possible to delivery units, pending the completion of required carrier training. Our review of the 135 sampled vehicles showed that 80 of them (59%) took between four weeks and ten months after delivery by the supplier to be deployed and used on EMA routes.”

The OIG stated at USPS management “attributed some of these vehicle utilization timeliness issues to lags in completing ... deployment prerequisites,” including driver training, issuance of fuel credit cards, vehicle maintenance, and route assignment. As the OIG noted,

“Broadly, the timeliness issues in completing prerequisites for vehicle deployment occurred because, at the start of the EMA route conversion process, headquarters’ Fleet Management and Rural Delivery Operations teams did not issue specific written guidance directing VMFs and district offices to complete the EMA route conversion process in a timely manner. Headquarters only tracked the number of vehicles received from the supplier and those that were deployed, as well as the total number of EMA routes converted. This analysis did not promptly identify issues or their sources. In addition, headquarters did not create a nationwide tool or report with vehicle and prerequisite information to assist VMF and district offices with mitigating vehicle deployment and utilization issues. ...

The Postal Service also didn’t always correctly prioritize GOV assignment. As the OIG explained:

“Our analysis also showed that conversions of EMA routes to GOV routes were not always correctly prioritized to maximize cost savings. Specifically, we found that at the start of the vehicle conversion process, 163 of the 2,678 (6%) EMA route conversions did not meet the initial mileage criteria and, relatedly, converting the route would not result in cost savings. ...

“... As suppliers delivered vehicles, district offices were responsible for ensuring the conversion of EMA routes from the preselected list of suitable routes. However, we found that 31 of the 67 district offices (46%) incorrectly converted 163 routes that did not meet the initial mileage criteria nor result in cost savings.

“The incorrect prioritization of EMA route conversions occurred because district offices did not have enough guidance to prioritize EMA route conversions to maximize cost savings when identifying alternative routes for conversion. ... This occurred because Fleet Management was not always aware of route characteristics that made a route ineligible for conversion, or the route’s eligibility changed before it was converted. In these instances where the district office found the preselected route unsuitable for the new vehicle, the vehicle was assigned to a suitable alternative route for conversion, an action that resulted in 163 routes not meeting mileage requirements and therefore not yielding any cost savings.

“... As a result, the Postal Service did not fully realize the cost savings originally outlined in the EMA Phase 1 DAR. In addition to the EMA route conversions that were not prioritized for cost savings and not timely utilizing right-hand drive COTS vehicles on EMA routes, the lack of cost savings was also heavily driven by COVID-19 delays with the supplier’s vehicle production, as well as a five month delay in the Postal Service awarding the contract.

These delays, especially those related to COVID-19, impacted about 42% of vehicles expected for delivery in FY 2020; however, the Postal Service’s vehicle supplier has until the end of FY 2022, Quarter (Q) 2, to deliver all 13,298 vehicles. Therefore, the Postal Service only realized about \$10.8 million of the projected \$35 million in EMA allowance cost savings for FY 2020.

**“Proposed EMA Route Conversion Plan Not Cost Efficient.** Our assessment identified that although the proposed vehicle acquisition plan for future EMA route conversions may provide increased safety and other benefits, it would not be the most cost-efficient option. Specifically, we analyzed the remaining EMA routes as of January 1, 2021, and estimated that it would be more economical for 11,531 of the remaining 34,903 (33%) EMA routes to remain unconverted under future DARs. ...

“The detailed analysis of routes that would not save money through conversion was not communicated in the Phase 1 DAR because Fleet Management did not summarize, in the original DAR, the financial impact of acquiring vehicles to convert EMA routes that would not result in cost savings. Our review of the original and Phase 1 EMA DARs prepared by Fleet Management showed that they only assessed two options: (1) purchasing the intended number of vehicles, which showed an overall positive net present value and return on investment; or (2) maintaining the status quo of continuing EMA payments to rural carriers. ...

“Although postal officials acknowledged that the conversion of some EMA routes would not maximize overall project cost savings, they noted the importance of other benefits of the acquisition compared to a lower total project savings, such as increased safety. Postal Service management mentioned rural carrier accounts of accidents related to the use of privately owned vehicles, citing safety as a significant reason for converting to GOV routes in the EMA Phase 1 DAR. ...”

### Recommendations

The OIG offered two recommendations to management:

- “... develop and issue written guidance that establishes expected timeframes for new vehicle deployment and utilization on rural routes,” and
- “... analyze and include the potential financial impact associated with rural route conversions that would not result in cost savings for consideration in future Decision Analysis Reports for vehicle acquisition.”

The OIG noted that

“Management partially agreed with finding 1 and agreed with finding 2 and both recommendations in the report. Regarding finding 1, management acknowledged that some vehicles had extended timelines for deployment and utilization. ...

“Regarding recommendation 1, management stated they will develop and distribute written guidance on expected vehicle deployment and utilization timeframes. The target implementation date is March 31, 2022.

“Regarding recommendation 2, management stated they will ensure that future DARs related to replacing privately owned vehicles will include an analysis on the financial impact of routes that would not result in cost savings. The target implementation date is February 27, 2023. ...”

Observers of the USPS can find two familiar themes in the OIG’s audit report, both related to the detachment of USPS HQ from the reality of its field operations. First would be that HQ determined routes to convert even though it wasn’t “always aware of route characteristics.” Secondly, HQ neither adequately understood, nor detected through observation, that field management needed program guidance that either wasn’t provided or wasn’t properly implemented. Such disconnects should be rare, but unfortunately aren’t.

## Almost No Business for USPS Check-Cashing Pilot

Since the end of the Post Office Department's US Postal Savings System's 55-year run in 1966, a variety of socially-liberal politicians have pressed the Postal Service to get into banking, arguing it would offer an alternative to private check cashing services which, postal banking advocates claim, predate the poor and "unbanked."

### Under the radar

Last September, without any public announcement, the agency quietly began a pilot test of what was framed as a check-cashing service. As then reported by *NBC News* and other outlets, the program was being tested at one facility each in Washington (DC), Falls Church (VA), Baltimore, and the Bronx. As further then reported by *American Banker*, under the test, the Postal Service

"... is only accepting business and payroll checks of \$500 or less, shutting out larger checks and any personal checks. The post office will not provide cash in exchange for the checks, and will instead let customers purchase a single-use gift card of up to \$500."

*The American Prospect* reported that it sent one of its employees to test the program:

"At first, [the postal worker] said she didn't think she could take the check. But she read the check into her scanner and it went through.' [The employee] didn't need to show identification or endorse the check. The post office charged [him] a flat fee of \$5.95, for any amount up to \$500."

Check-cashing businesses charge a percentage rate that could be \$15 or more for a \$500 check, so the lower charge at the post office would be more attractive to customers.

The USPS hadn't shown any particular interest in that business line, despite the urgings of the American Postal Workers Union (that sees it as a way to create jobs) and their Congressional adherents. Reportedly, former PMG Megan Brennan had not pursued developing the service even though the union had agreed to allow it to be tested.

All that changed, however, when the APWU met with Brennan's successor, Louis DeJoy. According to the *Prospect*,

"... when DeJoy took over, the union engaged him personally in a series of meetings, pitching the postal banking idea again. In a sign that DeJoy was interested, those meetings soon became weekly events, involving technical staff.

"They listened, they didn't shut us down,' said one APWU source involved in the negotiations. 'They have made the analysis that the future of the USPS lies not in letters but in packages, and they see the expansion of financial services as a companion to the package market.'

"One way the APWU got this across, union sources explained, was through an anecdote about another country with a postal banking system, Switzerland. If you order a pair of shoes online in Switzerland and they don't fit, you can take them back to the post office to return. Not only will they ship the shoes back to the retailer, but they will instantly credit your postal savings account. This fits with the USPS mission of efficiently promoting commerce, and it creates a competitive advantage over other shippers. The USPS leadership obviously saw that as a selling point."

To avoid having to seek approval from the Postal Regulatory Commission to offer a new "nonpostal" service, the USPS cleverly couched its test as part of an existing permitted service – the sale of gift cards – for which it is allowed charge a

small fee. By letting customers "purchase" a gift card with a paycheck – essentially premising the check-cashing service as simply a way to pay for a gift card – the USPS was able to justify needing no further approval from the PRC.

### Results or the lack thereof

Because the Postal Service was opaque about its test, it's unknown what costs are associated with the service or what new revenues were anticipated. Given that the USPS is already selling gift cards, allowing a paycheck to be used to pay for them (rather than cash or a personal or business check) should not alter costs. However, it was unclear last September when the test started whether there were any internal projections of new revenue. (Perhaps giving the APWU something it wanted was DeJoy's only purpose, hoping that a friendlier union would be less of a problem as he implemented other aspects of his 10-year Plan.)

Regardless, the results so far have been much less than impressive. As reported earlier this month by *Government Executive*, there's been a total of six sales at the four test sites over the four months since the pilot began, generating only \$37.50 in fees.

"Postal management declined to say what its plans are with the pilot moving forward, explaining any decisions are pending further evaluation of the results of the initial program. USPS said it will measure the success of the initiative based on customer usage and whether there was a demonstrated benefit to the community. ...

"USPS has not gone to great efforts to market the availability of its financial services. Before the program gained attention in national media outlets, USPS only announced the availability of the check cashing service through signs in the four affected post offices. ...

"For now, however, postal management is denying it has even entered the financial services world, telling the Postal Regulatory Commission it instead simply began accepting a new form of payment for an existing product. It launched the pilot at APWU's request, it said, and did not seek prior approval from the commission due to the limited nature of the program. USPS has engaged in limited training for the three-dozen employees at the four impacted post offices, including a service talk and a PowerPoint presentation."

Whether, and at what point, additional features could be added without requiring PRC approval is another matter. As *Government Executive* noted

"At the time it launched the pilot, postal management was looking to both raise the [\$500 per card cap] and allow for the bundling of multiple cards. Other services in discussion were a bill pay product, making the cards branded to the Postal Service and reloadable, and wire transfers from one post office to another. USPS has expressed an openness to setting up its own ATMs, though that may require additional statutory authority and was therefore only expected much further down the road."

At this point, as at the launch of the test, the Postal Service is Sphinx-like in its lack of information about the pilot or its plans for where to go from here. What is known is that, despite the hopes of the APWU and the claims of politicians about the need for such a service, \$37.50 in revenue over four months isn't the hallmark of a service encountering pent-up public demand.

## Miscellany

### New VPs

**Heather L. Dyer** has been named VP and chief information security officer, a role she has filled on an acting basis since November. Dyer is responsible for safeguarding the Postal Service's digital network, protecting information and technology assets from threats, and any digital security needs that develop with the introduction of new USPS products and services. Previously, Dyer was director, identity and access management, retail director, and worked in operations. Dyer has been with the Postal Service for more than 20 years.



**Garrett M. Hoyt** has been named VP Technology Applications, a role he has filled on an acting basis since October. Hoyt is responsible for developing digital approaches to improving customer engagement, transportation management, and product visibility and pricing. He's also responsible for modernizing platforms that support business functions. Previously, Hoyt was executive director, Chief Information Officer Services, managing a team that negotiated strategic, cost-saving technology contracts. Hoyt has been with the USPS for 34 years.



### Creativity

At least one post has separated itself from the usual image of postal providers as somewhat stuffy and unimaginative. As reported by *AdWeek*, Norway's Posten Norge was a little creative in a video celebrating its 375<sup>th</sup> anniversary; it's worth watching: <https://www.adweek.com/creativity/norwegian-postal-service-celebrates-375-years-with-fun-mildly-educational-ad/>.

### Going digital

After years of licensing its logo for clothing, coffee mugs, and other merchandise, the Postal Service has gone digital, getting into the somewhat faddish area of Non-Fungible Tokens.

According to *Federal News Network*, the agency's first venture was last November when it "partnered with the New Zealand-based NFT platform VeVe to offer four images of its Day of the Dead-inspired 'Forever' stamps as limited-edition NFTs." It offered another batch of stamp art on Christmas Eve, based on images of its Santa-themed "A Visit from St. Nick" stamps. Stamp art is saleable, as the USPS long-ago concluded, but using NFTs is a way to protect the authenticity of what it's selling digitally and validate that to buyers.

As the article noted, revenue aside, selling NFTs also lets the USPS preserve its copyright and trademark claims to older and retro designs by licensing those images for new products.

### Using test kits

The reported use of the USPS to deliver COVID test kits has raised a question about how those tests will fare if delivered in the cold weather present in much of the country. In response, as reported by *BestLife* ...

"If your USPS package arrives while your area is undergoing freezing temperatures, there are a number of things you can do to 'ensure appropriate test performance,' according to the [Food and Drug Administration]. The agency says you should first bring the package inside your home and leave it unopened at room temperature for at least two hours. Once this allotted time has gone by, your package should be good to open and use. 'As long as the test line(s) appear as described in the instructions, you can be confident that the test is performing as it should,' the FDA explains. ..."

### Helping a friend

Postal observers encounter a lot of stories, but this has to be among the more unusual, as reported by Dublin (Ireland)'s *independent.ie*:

"A dead man was brought to a post office this morning in an attempt to collect his pension in one of the most bizarre incidents that gardaí have ever seen.

"The shocking incident in which the deceased male was propped up by two other men happened at the post office on Staplestown Road in Carlow town. Staff at the post office immediately became suspicious and contacted emergency services and gardaí rushed to the scene. No money was handed over and it is understood that the deceased man is well known to the two men who moved his body.



"A local woman living beside the post office told how her daughter witnessed two men carrying a man into the shop. 'She was leaving my house at the time and said the man looked unwell as his feet were dragging the ground,' she said. The woman, who did not want to be named, said there was a queue outside of the post office at the time. 'It's a small shop and you're only allowed three at a time with social distancing. People were in shock as they thought he was after having a heart attack,' she said. 'I feel awful for the staff. They've suffered so many robberies over the years, they're worn out. I've a 12 year old daughter and I'm trying to explain to her what happened and sure where do you start. It's awful.'"

The New York *Daily News* picked up the story, noting in its characteristic style that

"Two men reportedly brought a third man, who was dead, to an Irish post office with hopes of collecting that stiff's pension payment. Their plan, like the pensioner, died."

## All the Official Stuff

### Federal Register

#### Postal Service

##### NOTICES

**January 28:** Sunshine Act Meetings [Board of Governors], 4671-4672.

**January 31:** Privacy Act of 1974; System of Records [3], 4957-4961, 4961-4964, 4964-4970.

##### PROPOSED RULES

[None].

##### FINAL RULES

[None].

#### Postal Regulatory Commission

##### NOTICES

**January 19:** Income Tax Review, 2943.

**January 28:** New Postal Products, 4671.

##### PROPOSED RULES

[None].

##### FINAL RULES

[None].

### DMM Advisory

**January 18:** UPDATE 217: International Mail Service Updates Related to COVID-19.

**January 24:** Monthly Labeling List Changes.

**January 26:** UPDATE 218: International Mail Service Updates Related to COVID-19.

**January 26:** International Service Suspension Notice – effective January 28, 2022.

**January 28:** UPDATE 219: International Mail Service Updates Related to COVID-19.

### Postal Bulletin (PB 22590, January 27)

- Effective **April 4**, DMM 204.3.2.4 and 602.11 are revised to add Plus One as a new permanent product offering.
- Effective **February 6**, IMM Exhibit 252.22 is revised to reflect that Electronic USPS Delivery Confirmation International service (E-USPS DELCON INTL) is available to Finland, Ireland, Sweden, and Switzerland (as of February 6, 2022).
- Effective **January 27**, Publication 431, *Post Office Box Service and Caller Service Fee Groups*, is revised to include the changes noted.

### USPS Industry Alerts

January 19, 2022

#### **CORRECTION – Service Type ID Table Updates for Ballot Mail and Political Mail**

Service Type IDs (STIDs) 721 and 742 were removed in error from the Ballot Mail STID Table published with prior Industry Alerts. These STIDs remain valid and are included in the corrected table below. Based on Industry feedback, the Service Type ID (STID) table available on PostalPro is being updated to include new STIDs for Ballot Mail and Political Mail that may be used when preparing mail for mailing on and after January 23, 2022. Use of the appropriate STIDs allows for Informed Visibility Mail Tracking & Reporting (IV-MTR) to identify mailpieces, with all expected service combinations, during mail processing. These new STIDs are only for use on Ballot Mail or Political Mail.

**Ballot Mail** is any Official Ballot mailed to or from authorized election officials. **Political Mail** is any material mailed for campaign purposes by a registered political candidate, campaign committee, or committee of a political party, or political message mailing by a political action committee (PAC), super PAC, or other organization engaging in an effort to influence or drive voter mobilization. NOTE: For other Election Mail (e.g., voter registration applications, polling place locations, absentee applications, sample ballots) use the appropriate STID for the mail class and ACS™ and IV®-MTR services desired that are identified for First-Class Mail (page 2) or USPS Marketing Mail (page 4) of the STID Table. The Election Mail attribute in eDoc (electronic documentation) should be used to identify a mailing that contains any type of Election Mail. Information on Informed Visibility Mail Tracking & Reporting can be found at: <https://postalpro.usps.com/InformedVisibility>. The current Service Type ID Table can be found at: <https://postalpro.usps.com/service-type-identifiers/stidtable>.

January 24, 2022

#### **Central Area AIM Meeting**

Please save the date for our Virtual Zoom Webinar scheduled for March 29, 2022, 10-Noon CT. Agenda to be announced. An invitation to register will follow soon. Hope you will be able to attend. Questions: Lois Gunlogson ([lois.a.gunlogson@usps.gov](mailto:lois.a.gunlogson@usps.gov)).

January 25, 2022

#### **2022 Promotions Updates & Webinar Scheduled for the Emerging and Advanced Technology Promotion**

Listed below is the latest information for the 2022 promotions:

**2022 Emerging and Advanced Technology Promotion Registration and Webinar.** Registration opened on January 15, 2022. The promotion provides mailers an opportunity to capitalize on the latest technologies to create an exciting mailpiece. With this promotion, mailers can make their offers stand out to drive customer engagement. A webinar to review the promotion program requirements will be held on Friday, January 28, at 1pm EST and will cover key information regarding what is new with the Emerging Technology Promotion, key dates, and eligibility. The link to the Zoom event is listed here: <https://usps.zoomgov.com/j/1603003412?pwd=Qms1bElTIRvNjI1UI-ZjRGttQ3BUQT09>

**2022 Informed Delivery Promotion Guidebook and Requirements now Posted.** The Informed Delivery Promotion enables business mailers to engage their customers through an integrated mail and digital marketing campaign that generates additional consumer impressions, interactions, and insights. The 2022 Informed Delivery Promotion Guidebook and Requirements are now available on PostalPro: <https://postalpro.usps.com/promotions/2022-informed-delivery/requirements>. This document is easy to navigate and use; it covers important information on Informed Delivery Promotion, such as key dates, eligibility, and participation requirements.

**2022 Tactile, Sensory & Interactive Promotion.** Promotion registration opened on December 15, 2021, and is open until July 31, 2022. The Promotion Period runs from February 1, 2022, to July 31, 2022. The Tactile, Sensory & Interactive Promotion helps mailers to create an engaging and memorable mailpiece. Participants can craft an interactive multi-sensory experience with specialty inks, interactive elements, and more to make an unforgettable mailpiece. A webinar to review the promotion details will be held soon. Please stay tuned for communications from the Promotions team and check PostalPro for updates. The webinar will cover changes to the Tactile, Sensory & Interactive Promotion as well as information regarding eligibility.

January 26, 2022

### **WestPac Area AIM Virtual Meeting**

Please save the date for our Virtual Zoom Webinar scheduled for February 11, 2022, 11am PT. An invitation to register and agenda will follow soon. We hope you will be able to attend. Questions: Steve Kern (steve.f.kern@usps.gov).

January 26, 2022

### **COVID-19 CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS UPDATE – International Service Suspension Notice**

[See the January 26 listing for COVID-19-Related International Mail Service Disruptions in the Special Section.]

January 28, 2022

### **New Vice President Retail and Delivery Operations, Central Area**

Effective immediately, Eric E. Henry will serve as Vice President, Retail and Delivery Operations, Central Area reporting directly to Joshua Colin, Chief Retail and Delivery Officer and Executive Vice President. Eric will be responsible for improving the customer experience by optimizing precision delivery with the use of technology and analytics, and by investing in our employees to drive an engaged workforce. Eric has worked to drive efficiency in Operations by utilizing analytics, engaging staff, and deploying standard processes to ensure all employees understand the role they play to achieve success. Over the course of Eric's 33 years of postal experience, he has held numerous executive and management positions including District Manager, Area Manager Delivery Programs Support, Manager Post Office Operations, Postmaster, and Acting Manager of City Delivery. Eric's experience in delivery and retail operations, mail processing, and customer service will continue to prove invaluable as he leads the Central Area toward continuous improvement and delivering quality performance for our customers.

## **Calendar**

[To register for any webinar, go to MailersHubWebinars.com](https://mailershub.usps.gov/webinars)

**February 10** – Western-Pacific Area AIM Meeting

**February 15** – [Mailers Hub Webinar: A Review of USPS Service](#)

**March 8** – Southern Area AIM Meeting

**March 15** – [Mailers Hub Webinar](#)

**March 29** – Central Area AIM Meeting

**April 5-6** – MTAC Meeting, USPS Headquarters

**April 11-14** – INg Executive Networking Forum, Tucson (AZ)

**April 14** – Atlantic Area AIM Meeting

**April 19** – [Mailers Hub Webinar](#)

**May 15-18** – National Postal Forum, Phoenix (AZ)

**May 24** – [Mailers Hub Webinar](#)

**June 21** – [Mailers Hub Webinar](#)

**July 19** – Atlantic Area AIM Meeting

**July 26-27** – MTAC Meeting, USPS Headquarters

**August 16** – Southern Area AIM Meeting

**August 24** – Central Area AIM Meeting

**October 20** – Atlantic Area AIM Meeting

**October 25-26** – MTAC Meeting, USPS Headquarters

## **Special Section: DMM Advisories and USPS Industry Alerts Related to COVID-19**

*These service disruptions affect Priority Mail Express International (PMEI), Priority Mail International (PMI), First-Class Mail International (FCMI), First-Class Package International Service (FCPIS), International Priority Airmail (IPA), International Surface Air Lift (ISAL), and M-Bag items. Unless otherwise noted, service suspensions to a particular country do not affect delivery of military and diplomatic mail.*

### **January 18, 2022, DMM Advisory: UPDATE 217: International Mail Service Updates Related to COVID-19**

On January 18, 2022, Poste Maroc, the designated operator of **Morocco**, provided notification that, following an increase in COVID-19 infections among its operational staff and in view of measures to limit the spread of the virus, delays are to be expected in the processing and delivery of inbound and outbound postal items.

### **January 26, 2022, DMM Advisory: UPDATE 218: International Mail Service Updates Related to COVID-19**

On January 26, 2022, Poste Maroc, the designated operator of **Morocco**, provided notification that the processing and delivery of inbound and outbound postal items has resumed as normal.

### **January 26, 2022, DMM Advisory: International Service Suspension Notice – effective January 28, 2022**

**[Also issued as January 26, 2022, Industry Alert: COVID-19 CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS UPDATE – International Service Suspension Notice]**

The Postal Service will temporarily suspend international mail acceptance for certain destinations due to service impacts related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Effective January 28, 2022, the Postal Service will suspend international mail acceptance to **China** until further notice due to unavailable transportation. Customers are asked to refrain from mailing the following service to China until further notice: Priority Mail International (PMI). For already deposited PMI items entered prior to 1/28/22, the Postal Service will transport to destination and delays are to be expected. For deposited PMI items entered on or after 1/28/22, the Postal Service will endorse the items as "Mail Service Suspended – Return to Sender" and place them in the mail stream for return to sender. Due to COVID-19, international shipping has been suspended to many countries. According to DMM 604.9.2.3, customers are entitled to a full refund of their postage costs when service to the country of destination is suspended. The detailed procedures to obtain refunds for Retail Postage, eVS, PC Postage, and BMEU entered mail can be found through the following link: <https://postalpro.usps.com/international-refunds>. The Postal Service is closely monitoring the situation and will continue to update customers until the situation returns to normal. Please visit our International Service Alerts page for the most up to date information: [https://about.usps.com/newsroom/service-alerts/international/?utm\\_source=residential&utm\\_medium=link&utm\\_campaign=res\\_to\\_intl](https://about.usps.com/newsroom/service-alerts/international/?utm_source=residential&utm_medium=link&utm_campaign=res_to_intl).

### **January 28, 2022, DMM Advisory: UPDATE 219: International Mail Service Updates Related to COVID-19**

On January 28, 2022, the Postal Service received notifications from various postal operators regarding changes in international mail services due to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The following countries have provided updates to certain mail services:

**Germany UPDATE:** Deutsche Post has advised that due to a significant increase in the number of COVID-19 infections among its operational staff and in view of measures to limit the spread of the virus, delays are to be expected in the processing and delivery of inbound and outbound postal items.

**New Zealand UPDATE:** New Zealand Post has advised that the Government of New Zealand has announced the application of the red setting of the “traffic lights” COVID-19 protection framework throughout the country as of January 23, 2022, impacting New Zealand Post’s operational performance in terms of processing, transport, sorting and delivery of mail.

 <p><b>BRANN &amp; ISAACSON</b> ATTORNEYS AND COUNSELORS AT LAW</p>	<p><i>The services of Brann &amp; Isaacson are now available to provide legal advice to subscribers. The firm is the Mailers Hub recommended legal counsel for mail producers on legal issues, including tax, privacy, consumer protection, intellectual property, vendor contracts, and employment matters. As part of their subscription, Mailers Hub subscribers get an annual consultation (up to one hour) from Brann &amp; Isaacson, and a reduced rate for additional legal assistance. The points of contact at Brann &amp; Isaacson are: Martin I. Eisenstein; David Swetnam-Burland; Stacy O. Stitham, <a href="mailto:ssstitham@brannlaw.com">sstitham@brannlaw.com</a>; Jamie Szal, <a href="mailto:jszal@brannlaw.com">jszal@brannlaw.com</a>. They can also be reached by phone at (207) 786-3566.</i></p>
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