

Delivering during the COVID-19 Pandemic: How the U.S. Postal Service Kept the Nation Connected

Beginning in March 2020 the United States Postal Service, along with the rest of the world, was severely challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic. As essential elements of our nation's infrastructure, postal workers labored under adverse conditions to successfully continue their mission: providing trusted, affordable mail service to every American. That mission became even more critical as millions of homebound Americans began ordering everyday necessities online. The swift delivery of mail and packages — including critical medical supplies and equipment — was also a key component in the fight against COVID. To keep postal workers safe, a team of top postal executives met around the clock to quickly create, communicate, and help implement new policies. Meanwhile, every day, front-line employees risked their health to deliver for America — and grateful Americans took notice.

Origin of COVID-19 and initial response

*We ... intend to act calmly and consistently based upon the advice of medical and public health professionals. If you are sick, stay home and get well.*¹

Postmaster General Megan Brennan, March 2020

In December 2019, reports emerged in China of pneumonia caused by an unknown virus. On January 5, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that a cluster of infected patients around the city of Wuhan suffered fever and shortness of breath. On January 11, the first death was reported in China; two days later, the first case was reported outside of China. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) began screening passengers from Wuhan entering the U.S. at three major airports on January 17. Three days later the first case of the disease caused by the virus in the U.S. was confirmed, in Washington state. On January 31, WHO declared a Global Health Emergency and the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services declared a public health emergency.

In February, WHO announced that the disease caused by the virus had been given an official name — COVID-19 — and that person-to-person transmission was likely. The first U.S. death caused by the virus was reported near Seattle, Washington, on February 29. The next day, a postal worker in the Seattle metro area tested positive for the virus.

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¹ U.S. Postal Service, "Coronavirus update: PMG delivers message to employees," *Link* news site, March 9, 2020, <https://link.usps.com/2020/03/09/coronavirus-update-2/> (accessed August 16, 2022).

Postmaster General Megan Brennan addressed employees via video on March 9, stating:

We are aware of only one employee who has tested positive for COVID-19. This employee works in our Seattle network distribution center and had recently returned from overseas travel. The employee is recuperating at home and, we're happy to say, is expected to have a full recovery. We've been working closely with the Seattle and King County Washington public health departments, and they have told us that the current risk to other employees in the same workplace is low.²

On March 11, as the virus quickly spread throughout the world, WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. The following week, the Postal Service launched COVID-19 Resources pages on its webpages for employees, Blue and LiteBlue. These pages featured information and guidance from both the CDC and the Postal Service on COVID-19 issues. The Postal Service also began providing COVID-19 stand-up talks to be delivered by managers and supervisors to their employees on topics ranging from workplace hygiene to employee assistance programs.

On March 13, President Donald Trump declared COVID-19 to be a national emergency. The CDC and White House created a postcard with "President Trump's Coronavirus Guidelines for America." The guidelines emphasized that Americans should stay home, avoid travel, and avoid social gatherings. On March 21, the Postal Service began delivering the postcards to all 138 million residential addresses in the nation. (See Appendix A, "Postcard with President's Coronavirus Guidelines.")

Within weeks, the virus spread across the United States. By March 22, New York City had become a global epicenter of the pandemic, with roughly 5 percent of the world's confirmed cases.³ Nationwide, essential businesses implemented telework and social-distancing measures to reduce the risk of contagion, while many nonessential businesses closed their doors. By the end of March, the U.S. had more than 163,000 reported cases of COVID-19 and more than 3,000 deaths.⁴ (See Appendix B, "Key Dates in COVID-19 Pandemic and Postal Service Response," for more information on the impact of the pandemic on the U.S.)

USPS COVID-19 Response Command Team

The fear, the unknowns, were many and broad. And it became clear to me ... that we needed to bring to bear...the whole of Postal, and put dedicated resources, officer-led, to give it the standing, frankly, that it needed, and the authority from me to get our arms around this.⁵

Former Postmaster General Megan Brennan, January 2022

Even before the virus was reported in the U.S., an ad hoc work group at Postal Service headquarters anticipated its arrival. That group included Simon Storey, Employee Resource Management vice president; Pat Mendonca, senior director in the Office of the Postmaster General; Mike Swigart, director of National Preparedness; Linda DeCarlo, director of Safety and Health, and David Ellis, managing counsel, Employment and Labor Law. The group set about updating the Postal Service's pandemic policy plan. "We knew between January and February it was just a matter of time because of the continued travel and the exposure," recalled Storey, "so we started planning."⁶

By early March, the Postal Service was grappling with myriad challenges caused by the pandemic. Once the first postal workers became infected the situation rapidly escalated. "In those early days nobody knew the answers to anything," recalled Kristin Seaver, who was chief information officer and executive vice president at the time. "You were really just trying to bring order to chaos."⁷

² Ibid., from transcript of linked video "Business Focus: Special Edition," also online at <https://link.usps.com/video/business-focus-special-edition/> (accessed August 16, 2022).

³ Jesse McKinley, "New York City Region Is Now an Epicenter of the Coronavirus Pandemic," *The New York Times*, March 22, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/22/nyregion/Coronavirus-new-York-epicenter.html> (accessed August 16, 2022).

⁴ Stephanie Kelly and Daniel Trotta, "U.S. coronavirus death toll rises past 3,000 on deadliest day," Reuters.com, March 30, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa/u-s-coronavirus-death-toll-rises-past-3000-on-deadliest-day-idUSKBN21H1LX> (accessed August 16, 2022).

⁵ Oral history interview with Megan J. Brennan, January 26, 2022, 5, *USPS COVID-19 Oral History Project*, in files of USPS Historian.

⁶ Oral history interview with Simon Storey, November 24, 2021, 5, *USPS COVID-19 Oral History Project*, in files of USPS Historian.

⁷ Oral history interview with Kristin Seaver, January 19, 2022, 7, *USPS COVID-19 Oral History Project*, in files of USPS Historian.

On March 20, Brennan formed the COVID-19 Response Command Team, led by key postal executives, to provide a comprehensive approach to the pandemic. She took the unorthodox step of taking top executives out of their day-to-day jobs so they could focus their full attention on responding to the pandemic; subordinates took over their regular duties.⁸ Brennan appointed Seaver to lead the group. Brennan later recalled: “Kristin and I had worked together for more than a decade or so, so I was very familiar with her skill set and her organizational prowess.” She added, “Candidly, Kristin will knock down doors.”⁹

The COVID-19 Response Command Team covered four key areas, each led by a USPS officer:

- Employee response: Simon Storey, Employee Resource Management vice president
- Operational continuity: Joshua Colin, acting vice president, Processing and Maintenance Operations
- Business continuity: Mark Guilfoil, Supply Management vice president
- Customer continuity: Steve Monteith, Marketing vice president¹⁰

The team was augmented by others with expertise in specific areas. Among them, Janice Walker, Corporate Communications vice president, coordinated communications related to COVID-19, while David Ellis coordinated legal concerns on behalf of the general counsel’s office. By having all of the chief officers working together, decisions could be made, and solutions reached, much more quickly than under normal circumstances. Seaver described how the command tackled the crisis: “We basically triaged the major acute issues of the day, and then allocated who was going to get that work done. They would go out to the larger working team in the organization proper and then...brought ourselves back to the afternoon, ‘What did we get done? What still needs to be done? What’s new?’ And then close out the day. I closed out every day around six o’clock, providing the PMG [postmaster general] with a briefing.”¹¹

To help document the Postal Service’s response to COVID-19, members of the command team were interviewed about their roles responding to the pandemic. Interviews with key team members, as well as former Postmaster General Megan Brennan, were conducted from November 2021 through January 2022.

While the command team tackled emerging issues, much of Brennan’s time was spent communicating with the Postal Service’s key constituencies. “We’ve got a diverse group of stakeholders, and they sometimes have competing interests...our employees at large, our customers, our industry partners, the union leadership, the management associations, the Hill, the Board of Governors,” she said. “Much of my day was spent meeting either with Kristin and/or the COVID command team...[and] briefing these various stakeholder groups,” said Brennan, adding, “It was all-consuming.”¹²

For members of the command team, the days were long, and weekends were nonexistent during the first few months of the pandemic. “It was beginning of the morning to 8:00 or 9:00 pm,” said Joseph Bruce, director of National Human Resources at the time, “It was nonstop Saturday, Sunday.”¹³ By being sharply focused on the issues at hand, Monteith said, “the 12-to-14-hour days flew.”¹⁴ Swigart said, “We were working seven days a week at that point. When you looked up and you went to the store on a Sunday afternoon, you were like, ‘Dang, I haven’t been out of the house for like six days.’”¹⁵

“In the early days it was so unnerving, and employees were fearful,” said Brennan. “They were getting sick, or their loved ones were getting sick, or people in their communities were getting sick. And we had a challenge in terms of employee availability.” She continued, “As postmaster general, my responsibility [was] the safety and well-being of the employees, and also ensuring that the Postal Service would continue to meet our core function of delivery of mail and packages.”¹⁶

⁸ In early June 2020, the COVID-19 Response Command Team shifted from urgent response mode to managing ongoing operations. At that time, the team members transitioned back to their regular positions, while continuing to serve as the lead points of contact for their key areas of responsibility as part of their official duties.

⁹ Brennan interview, page 5.

¹⁰ On July 30, 2020, Postmaster General Louis DeJoy named Simon Storey as head of the COVID command team in place of Kristin Seaver. The titles listed here reflect positions held by the officers in March 2020.

¹¹ Seaver interview, page 6.

¹² Brennan interview, pages 5–6.

¹³ Oral history interview with Joseph Bruce, January 24, 2022, 5, *USPS COVID-19 Oral History Project*, in files of USPS Historian.

¹⁴ Oral history interview with Steve Monteith, December 2, 2021, 9, *USPS COVID-19 Oral History Project*, in files of USPS Historian.

¹⁵ Oral history interview with Mike Swigart, January 19, 2022, 5, *USPS COVID-19 Oral History Project*, in files of USPS Historian.

¹⁶ Brennan interview, 6.

With the first case of COVID-19 in the Postal Service on March 1, postal leaders began refining the Postal Service's pandemic response plan. Bruce recalled talking on the phone to employees in Seattle: "It was a Saturday or Sunday morning, we were on the phone with the facility walking through this with the managers...the HR staff, and the doctors out there.... It was actually from that case where we started drafting up...the initial checklist we used to tell people how to respond."¹⁷ What had been abstract was suddenly concrete. "This was [a] rubber hitting the road kind of thing," said Bruce. "We knew big-picture how things were going to work, [such as], 'Oh we're going to have to tell people to social distance and things like that.'"¹⁸

Bruce's team needed to provide directions — clear step-by-step instructions on what to do when there was COVID-19 in a postal facility. When to send people home? When *not* to send people home? What level of cleaning was appropriate in a building? When to contact local public health officials? There were so many questions and contingencies regarding COVID-positive and COVID-exposed employees that a decision tree was created. The decision tree provided postal supervisors with easily digestible, graphic guidance on how to respond to different COVID-related employee scenarios. It was regularly updated as understanding of the disease grew and policies adapted. (See Appendix C, "COVID-19 — Initial Decision Tree.")

Stand-up talks were written to communicate essential information to employees. Yvonne Yoerger, a manager in Corporate Communications, recalled that a big challenge when crafting pandemic messaging "was to get across a balance of 'This is serious, please pay attention to this,' versus, 'Oh my gosh, here's another stand-up talk.'"¹⁹ By the end of 2020 the Postal Service had issued 60 COVID-related stand-up talks. (See Appendix D, "List of COVID-19 Stand-Up Talks.")

Meanwhile, the number of new, positive cases in the Postal Service steadily increased. On March 25, a 50-year-old letter carrier in New York became the first postal worker known to die of COVID-19. By May 15, sixty postal workers had died. By the end of July 2020, 33,945 employees had taken leave to quarantine, and 7,421 had tested positive for the virus.²⁰

"The first time we were notified that an employee died, I'll tell you, that changed things," said Joseph Bruce. "As much as we were doing to try to keep people safe ... people died."²¹ The impact of employee losses reverberated in the postal community. Simon Storey noted that such losses were not only "a huge impact to their immediate family, for their sons and daughters, or husbands or wives. ... But it's also an impact to the postal family. ... You get down into these smaller Post Offices, it really is a family."²² The Postal Service's Employee Assistance Program provided grief counselors to help affected employees.

Union and management cooperation

*The employees at large, led by the union presidents and the presidents of the management associations, [are] just really a tremendous group of people dedicated to the same cause at the end of the day, which is serving the American public.*²³

Former Postmaster General Megan Brennan, January 2022

To effectively respond to COVID-19, the command team needed to change many work rules and policies. As these were governed by collective bargaining agreements and federal law, the changes had to be carefully crafted. Not only did the changes have to take effect immediately, but they had to be acceptable to postal labor unions and management associations. Policy changes also had to stand up to any legal challenges that might be brought.

"The Postal Service is not equipped, being the third largest civilian employer in the world, with 630,000 employees, to be able to turn on a dime," said David Ellis, who was managing counsel of Employment and Labor Law in early 2020. "We have four major unions, we've got management organizations, we've got smaller

¹⁷ Bruce interview, 4.

¹⁸ Bruce interview, 4.

¹⁹ Oral history interview with Yvonne Yoerger, December 27, 2021, 9, *USPS COVID-19 Oral History Project*, in files of USPS Historian.

²⁰ U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General, "Employee Safety — Postal Service COVID-19 Response," Report Number 20-259-R21, November 20, 2020, 1, at <https://www.uspsaig.gov/sites/default/files/document-library-files/2020/20-259-R21.pdf> (accessed August 17, 2022).

²¹ Bruce interview, 9.

²² Storey interview, 9.

²³ Brennan interview, 12.

unions. And whenever we create or change policy, we have to work through the unions as it impacts their employees, and to the extent needed, we have to bargain with them over the issues.”²⁴ In 2020, 90 percent of postal workers were covered by collective bargaining agreements.

Negotiating changes in labor contracts was traditionally a drawn out and contentious undertaking. Credit for the Postal Service, the unions, and management associations being able to reach agreements and sign memorandums of understanding (MOUs) so quickly belongs to the leadership of the unions and associations, along with a dedicated group of USPS employment law attorneys. USPS attorneys were “the unsung heroes,” recalled Brennan, explaining “they get you to yes, they figure out how we can maneuver within the letter of the law.”²⁵

Rapid agreement on policy changes was just one benefit of the partnership with postal unions. Equally important was the timely dissemination of factual information about the coronavirus from trusted sources. Each of the unions created COVID-19 pages on their websites, where they freely shared the most up-to-date information. “I credit our employees — the union presidents and the presidents of the management associations in particular — for assisting us in communicating directly to their members, our employees,” said Brennan.²⁶

“We made a lot of positive strides with working with our union partners,” said Katie Chounet, an employment law attorney for the Postal Service.²⁷ Over the course of the pandemic, the Postal Service, the unions and associations signed more than 150 MOUs. Chounet said, “Just talking with the union leaders and saying, ‘Look, we need to deal with this issue. ... Let’s come together.’”²⁸ “Frankly,” said Brennan, “those were not always easy conversations,” but by having the union presidents at the table “we were able to sign MOUs in short order.”²⁹ (See Appendix E, “Lists of Pandemic-Responsive MOUs.”)

Protecting employees and customers

*Normally, it's like trying to turn the Titanic here in getting a policy out. ... We were trying to write a policy and get it issued within days, and just kind of constantly working on that. ... It started to click at that point, this is going to be a very different type of assignment.*³⁰

Katie Chounet, chief counsel USPS Employment Law, January 2022

The sudden changes wrought by COVID-19 were reflected almost immediately in postal facilities across the nation. On February 11, a month before the disease was declared a pandemic, employees were advised to wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water were not available. On March 4, the daily cleaning protocols for postal facilities were updated to reflect the latest guidance from the CDC, which included regularly cleaning frequently touched surfaces and shared items, prioritizing areas with the most human traffic. Custodians were advised to wear impermeable gloves when emptying trash cans, to carefully avoid touching the outside surface of the gloves when removing them, and to wash their hands immediately afterwards.

On March 11, a stand-up talk informed all employees of the new COVID-19 resources webpages on Blue and LiteBlue, which included a new CDC factsheet and the poster “Keep Calm and Wash Your Hands,” which managers were encouraged to print and display in work areas.

On March 17, vehicle operators were instructed to clean frequently touched surfaces in their vehicles with household cleaner as soon as possible if anyone using the vehicle had COVID-19 symptoms, and to wash their hands often. On March 18, the stand-up talk “Guidance on Social Gatherings” advised all employees to “avoid close contact (within six feet) with other people to the degree possible” and provided other reminders, including “stay home when you’re sick” and “wash hands often.”³¹ In some facilities, employee start times were staggered to promote social distancing.

²⁴ Ellis interview, 6. The four major postal unions were the American Postal Workers Union (APWU), the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC), the National Rural Letter Carriers Association (NRLCA), and the National Postal Mail Handlers Union.

²⁵ Brennan interview, 12.

²⁶ Brennan interview, 6.

²⁷ Chounet interview, 18.

²⁸ Chounet interview, 18.

²⁹ Brennan interview, 9.

³⁰ Chounet interview, 5.

³¹ U.S. Postal Service, COVID-19 SUT 9, “Guidance on Social Gatherings,” March 18, 2020, <https://blue.usps.gov/blue/pdf/covid-19/stand-up-talk-guidance-on-social-gathering-2020-03-18.pdf> (accessed August 17, 2022).

On March 25, the Postal Service provided retail employees with new guidelines to help them practice social distancing on the job, based on the CDC's recommendation that people stay at least 6 feet apart. USPS retail locations placed tape on the floor to show customers where to stand while in line. Retail employees were directed to display social distancing signage in lobbies and use every other counter, if operationally feasible. On April 1, signatures were no longer needed for payment card transactions and became "touchless." On April 4, Post Offices were advised to install plastic or plexiglass sneeze guards to minimize contact with customers.

A stand-up talk given on March 23 advised employees that the Postal Service was continuing "normal operations" as the nation dealt with COVID-19. While the Postal Service continued its vital mission of delivering the nation's mail, many regular practices were curtailed, including:

- Employees were advised to avoid social gatherings of more than ten people.
- Passport fairs were suspended.
- Training for retail associates was limited to groups of ten people, including the instructor.
- Business travel was restricted to only that which was "mission-critical."
- Previously announced stamp dedication ceremonies were canceled or conducted virtually.
- The grace period for PO Box payments was extended to 30 days.
- The annual Letter Carriers' Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive was postponed.

Telework for employees

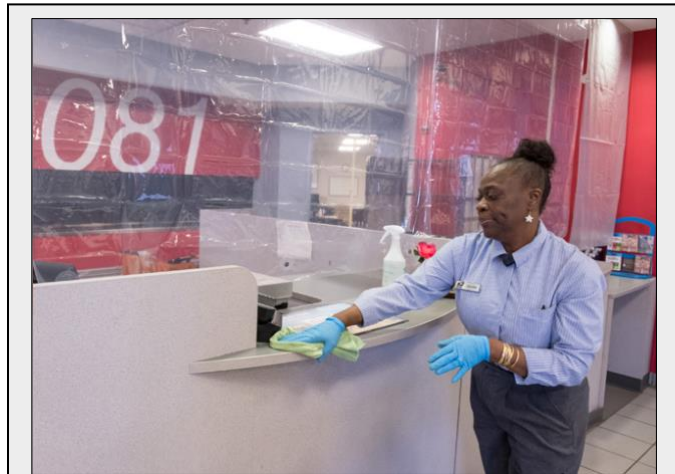
Our culture had always been, so everybody's got to be physically present in the workplace. The reality of COVID required us to change our mindset around that.³²

Kristin Seaver, former chief information officer and executive vice president, January 2022

To slow the spread of the coronavirus, many schools and businesses closed. For example, New York City public schools — the largest school system in the nation, with 1.1 million students — shut down on March 15, 2020. While the majority of postal employees had to be physically present to perform their work, it was possible for some employees to work remotely.

For postal employees in some administrative positions, teleworking had been an option long before the pandemic. Depending on the nature of their jobs, EAS (executive and administrative schedule) and PCES (postal career executive service) employees were permitted one or two days of telework per week. They had been provided with Postal Service-issued laptop computers and a VPN (virtual private network) security token, which allowed them to connect to the Postal Service's network via a secure server. On March 18, 2020, the telework policy was expanded to allow up to five days of telework per week for all administrative employees who didn't need to be physically present in the workplace.

Some telework-eligible employees lacked a Postal Service-issued laptop. For Kristin Seaver, the burning question was, "Do we have the technology to get people out of the office for remote work?"³³ The solution her team came up with was virtual desktop interface (VDI). From their home computers, employees could log in to their USPS desktop using VDI. Even though these employees were working on their personal computer, a firewall protected the security of the USPS network. Within two weeks, the Postal Service brought 17,000 new teleworkers online.



Cleaning a retail counter, 2020

During the COVID-19 pandemic, enhanced cleaning protocols and the installation of sneeze guards at retail counters made Post Office lobbies safer for both employees and customers.

³² Seaver interview, 4.

³³ Seaver interview, 3.

In addition to protecting employees, teleworking provided a couple of unexpected benefits: productivity increased as some employees worked longer hours in lieu of commuting, and some work teams were able to collaborate with colleagues nationwide in new ways, since geography was no longer a factor. Computer applications like Zoom allowed users to attend meetings from anywhere by using their computer or other device. If their device had a camera, participants could appear onscreen alongside other attendees.

In addition to expanding telework for administrative employees, the Postal Service offered the telework option to certain craft employees.³⁴ “We were very, very concerned with the call centers,” Seaver recalled, “because you had several hundred employees in very confined locations.”³⁵ Craft employees in USPS call centers fielded calls from postal customers and provided technical assistance to postal employees. Unlike with EAS employees, there was no precedent for craft employees working remotely. The Postal Service quickly negotiated an agreement with the American Postal Workers Union (APWU), which represented employees at call centers.

“We had to get them computers, we had to get them the headgear and all that,” recalled Steve Monteith, who was vice president of Marketing at the time. Some call center workers still came into the buildings, but the majority — over 1,000 — transitioned to telework. This not only increased employee safety, but also attendance and productivity. “Our customer satisfaction went up, even though we were getting two to three times the number of calls that we would normally have gotten,” recalled Monteith.³⁶ Seaver explained: “It was like a perfect storm. ... We were handling over 800,000 calls a day at the beginning of COVID. People thought you could get COVID by touching the mail, and people were calling. And then the package volume increased and that caused people to be calling.”³⁷

The expanded telework policy was originally set to end on May 11, 2020. It was extended a number of times and finally ended on April 18, 2022. The policy that replaced it allowed more telework than pre-pandemic — up to three days per week.

Expanded leave options for employees

*[In] trying to implement new leave types — I have learned more about our payroll systems than I ever think I wanted or needed to know.*³⁸

Katie Chounet, chief counsel USPS Employment Law, January 2022

To encourage employees who may have been exposed to COVID-19 to stay home, the Postal Service struck agreements with the four major postal labor unions on March 18. The agreements granted non-career employees, who did not earn leave before the pandemic, up to 80 hours of paid leave in certain COVID-related instances. Shortly thereafter it was followed by a liberalized policy on schedule changes and various types of leave for all employees, particularly Sick Leave for Dependent Care.

The *Families First Coronavirus Response Act* (FFCRA) created two new types of leave available to postal employees beginning in April 2020: up to 80 hours of emergency paid sick leave were available to workers impacted by COVID-19, and up to 12 weeks of Public Health Emergency Leave if their child’s school or daycare closed due to the pandemic.³⁹ The act was signed into law on March 18 and took effect on April 1, allowing less than two weeks for the Postal Service to analyze the law’s implications and re-program its payroll systems. By the time the FFCRA expired on December 31, 2020, 27 percent of the postal workforce had used COVID-related leave. City carriers, sales and service associates, and city carrier assistants — the employees who interacted most with members of the public — represented the top three employee groups who took COVID-19 leave. After the FFCRA expired, the Postal Service continued to allow employees liberal leave usage for COVID-19-related reasons.

The *American Rescue Plan Act* was signed into law on March 11, 2021, and took effect the next day. This act was similar to the FFCRA in that it created a new category of leave — emergency federal employee leave (EFEL). Under the *American Rescue Plan Act*, full-time federal employees were eligible to receive up to 600

³⁴ Craft employees are bargaining unit workers, which include employees such as clerks, city carriers, rural carriers, and mail handlers.

³⁵ Seaver interview, 3–4.

³⁶ Monteith interview, 11.

³⁷ Seaver interview, 4.

³⁸ Chounet interview, 5.

³⁹ See U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General, “COVID-19 Leave Administration,” Report Number 21-032-R21, June 16, 2021, <https://www.uspsoidg.gov/sites/default/files/document-library-files/2021/21-032-R21.pdf> (accessed August 17, 2022).

hours of paid leave when they were unable to work because of a qualifying COVID-19-related reason. Part-time employees were eligible for EFEL in an amount proportional to their regular work schedules, not to exceed 600 hours. EFEL was available to postal employees until September 30, 2021. According to the Office of Personnel Management, postal employees used more than 10.5 million hours of EFEL at a cost of \$269.7 million.⁴⁰ Even after EFEL expired, the Postal Service continued its liberal leave policy.

Procuring PPE during global shortage

*We needed to have the PPE and that's what the union presidents, the management association presidents, early on, that's what we spent a significant amount of time on, ensuring that we had that.*⁴¹

Former Postmaster General Megan Brennan, January 2022

The ability of the Postal Service to perform its mission was tested early in the pandemic due to a shortage of hand sanitizer and personal protective equipment (PPE). Although the CDC did not initially recommend face coverings, on March 18 the Postal Service advised employees it would provide face masks to employees who requested them. Employees could also request nitrile gloves, which had been authorized as protective equipment for postal employees following the 2001 anthrax attacks.⁴² Although not recommended by the CDC in most situations, many people chose to wear gloves as a form of personal protection, especially early in the pandemic when little was known about how COVID spread. A spike in demand and bottlenecks in the supply chain led to a national shortage of face masks and gloves, nearly all of which were produced abroad. Similarly, hand sanitizer, disinfectants and other cleaning products were in short supply. The Postal Service's stock on hand was quickly depleted and the vendors who normally supplied such items were prioritizing health care facilities.

For the COVID command team, providing PPE for employees on the front lines was their first major challenge. To facilitate ordering these vital supplies, the Postal Service quickly liberalized its purchasing policies, allowing non-competitive purchases, removing quantity limitations, and streamlining the ordering process. Facility managers were authorized to spend up to \$10,000 per purchase. If they located a source with supplies greater than \$10,000, the Supply Management Commodity Team stood ready to assist them to make the purchase. The Postal Service willingly accepted locally donated supplies like hand sanitizer but barred employees from actively soliciting such donations. For employees who bought COVID-19 supplies out of their own pockets, the Postal Service authorized reimbursement.

In addition to liberalizing its purchasing policies for managers, the Postal Service empowered its front-line workers to make emergency purchases. Many letter carriers already had government-issued Voyager credit cards, but these were normally valid only for fueling, repairing, and towing their postal vehicles. From March through June 2020, the Voyager cards were temporarily modified to allow the purchase of hand sanitizer from gas stations and auto parts stores. Similarly, employees who had government-



Delivering during the pandemic, 2020

In April 2020, the Centers for Disease Control recommended wearing face coverings to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Some postal workers also chose to wear gloves.

⁴⁰ U.S. Office of Personnel Management, "Policy, Data, Oversight. Pay & Leave: American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, Status of the Federal ARPA Funds (as of 07/28/2022)," at <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/ARPA/ARPA-EPL-Dashboard.xlsx?v=07282022> (accessed August 17, 2022).

⁴¹ Brennan interview, 6.

⁴² For information on the 2001 anthrax attacks, see USPS Publication 100, *The United States Postal Service: An American History* (2020), 77, at <https://about.usps.com/publications/pub100.pdf> (accessed August 15, 2022).

issued credit cards for official travel were temporarily authorized to use them to purchase COVID-19 supplies at retail locations. Meanwhile, \$25 gift cards, normally available for customer purchase at select Post Offices, were provided to carriers and other personnel as a form of petty cash to buy COVID supplies for the benefit of postal employees at their work unit. These included cleaning supplies, hand sanitizer, and toilet paper, among other things.

Mark Guilfoil, vice president of Supply Management, quickly formed sourcing teams for essential COVID-related supplies. The teams tracked 12 to 14 critical supply items, including face masks and face coverings, gloves, hand sanitizer, disinfectants, and spray bottles. The teams were successful in locating new sources to purchase many of the supplies, including some unconventional suppliers. For example, when hand sanitizer was in short supply, Guilfoil's team got a list of every distillery in the country and asked, "Are you making hand sanitizer? Yes? Great, do you have any that I can buy?"⁴³ The team also found distilleries willing to switch from making liquor to hand sanitizer. Producing the hand sanitizer was only the first step — the product had to be tested to make sure it met technical specifications and was safe. Out of necessity, many distilleries used whatever containers they had on hand — in some cases, liquor bottles. Guilfoil recalled that they took anything they could get, even if it came in 55-gallon drums — they bought hoses and pumps to put it in smaller jugs.

Guilfoil's team also leveraged relationships with existing suppliers to tap new sources. Guilfoil told suppliers, "Look, I need your help. You are key suppliers to the Postal Service. Even if this is not in an area that you would normally supply us, if you have contacts to be able to get PPE, or gloves ... please do and I will contract with you."⁴⁴ One company, Wheeler Brothers, which normally provided parts for postal vehicles, procured millions of surgical masks for the Postal Service during the pandemic.

To track which facilities had the supplies they needed, and which didn't, Supply Management and the Informed Visibility team under the chief technology officer collaborated to create online dashboards and surveys for reporting inventory. This COVID supply visibility tool allowed them to check the status of 12 essential items at every facility in the nation. Supply Management then partnered with the Sales and Marketing organization to create a call center dedicated to contacting facilities that seemed to be low on essential supplies. For example, Guilfoil said they might call Bentonville, Arkansas, and say, "We see that you don't have toilet paper. Is that accurate?" If they were out, the call center would arrange for some to be shipped.⁴⁵



Hand sanitizer acquired in 2020 (2022 photo)

Early in the pandemic, unprecedented demand led to global shortages of PPE and other vital supplies, like hand sanitizer. In the U.S., some companies quickly pivoted from their normal product lines to producing hand sanitizer to help meet the surging demand. Out of necessity, companies packaged sanitizer in whatever containers they had on hand, including liquor bottles, motor oil containers, and 55-gallon drums. As needed, the Postal Service repackaged hand sanitizer for use by employees.

The Toilet Paper Panic of 2020

The fear and uncertainty produced by the pandemic led to panic buying worldwide. In the spring and summer of 2020, many vital necessities disappeared from supermarket shelves across the globe — most notably, toilet paper. By March 23, toilet paper was reportedly out of stock at 70 percent of U.S. grocery stores, with shortages continuing for months.

⁴³ Guilfoil interview, 12.

⁴⁴ Guilfoil interview, 7.

⁴⁵ Guilfoil interview, 8.

To mask or not to mask?

*At some point in the spring [of 2020], the determination was made ... [that] this is an airborne virus, that's how you're gonna get it. So that's really when you started to see the shift to the cloth masks, and, you know, everybody needs to wear a mask indoors — not just us, but globally.*⁴⁶

Mike Swigart, director of National Preparedness, January 2022

The Postal Service took its cues on the use of face coverings and other preventative measures from the CDC.⁴⁷ Early efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19 were focused on hand washing, surface cleaning, and social distancing. Initially, masks were believed to offer no benefit to healthy individuals. In March 2020, the CDC website advised those who weren't sick "You do not need to wear a facemask unless you are caring for someone who is sick."⁴⁸ Masks were in very short supply and urgently needed by caregivers. The need was so urgent that early on, the Postal Service donated a supply of its N-95 masks to Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. "We thought it was prudent ... because there was such a dire need in the medical community," recalled Postmaster General Brennan.⁴⁹

On April 3, 2020, when it became clear that individuals without symptoms could spread COVID-19, the CDC changed its guidance, recommending masks for anyone in a public setting who couldn't maintain social distance. On April 6, the Postal Service encouraged employees to follow the CDC's recommendation and offered to provide surgical masks to workers. Employees were also free to wear their own cloth face coverings at work but were advised not to rely solely on face coverings to prevent the spread of COVID-19. They were also encouraged to wash their hands often and to practice social distancing "whenever possible while on delivery routes, at retail counters, and within the postal workplace."⁵⁰ On April 21, 2020, the face covering policy was modified making cloth face coverings or masks *mandatory* when required by local or state orders, and in all USPS facilities where social distancing could not be maintained.

This policy remained in place until July 27, 2021, when fully vaccinated employees were no longer required to wear face coverings, except where required by local regulations. But just one month later, the previous policy was reinstated as the Delta variant of COVID-19 led to a wave of new infections. With a declining number of COVID-19 infections, the Postal Service ended its mandatory face covering policy effective March 29, 2022.



Face coverings issued in 2020 (2022 photo)

Initially, the Postal Service distributed disposable surgical masks to employees who requested them. Beginning in mid-June 2020, washable, reusable coverings were provided — blue hot-weather gaiters to mail carriers and black cooling masks to mail processing employees. In July, gray cloth masks were distributed to employees, followed by blue masks with the USPS logo in late September.

⁴⁶ Swigart interview, 8.

⁴⁷ A notable exception: in April 2020 the CDC recommended that employers take employees' temperature. The Postal Service tested temperature taking in May 2020 at four facilities — three in Virginia and one in Oklahoma — but found that the process was resource intensive, raised privacy concerns, and was insufficient to identify employees infected with COVID-19.

⁴⁸ Jacqueline Howard, "Should You Wear a Mask? U.S. Health Officials Re-examine Guidance Amid Coronavirus Crisis," CNN.com, March 31, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/31/health/coronavirus-masks-experts-debate/index.html> (accessed Aug. 17, 2022).

⁴⁹ Brennan interview, 4.

⁵⁰ U.S. Postal Service, COVID-19 SUT 32, "Additional CDC Guidance," April 6, 2020, <https://blue.usps.gov/blue/pdf/covid-19/covid-19-sut-32-all-employees-a-additional-cdc-guidance.pdf> (accessed August 17, 2022).

Postal medical staff conducts contact tracing

*The Postal Service's quick actions likely saved lives and certainly increased employee safety.*⁵¹

USPS Office of Inspector General, November 2020

As with other communicable diseases, one of the keys to limiting the spread of COVID-19 was identifying anyone who had been in contact with an infected person. By tracing the contacts of infected individuals, testing them for infection, encouraging them to isolate, and tracing *their* contacts, new infections in the general population could be minimized. Contact tracing had traditionally been conducted by public health authorities, but with the first outbreaks of COVID-19 on the west coast, it became clear that public health agencies were overwhelmed.

"Immediately," said Simon Storey, "we knew we were doing the contact tracing."⁵² The process had to be developed from the ground up and it had to be done in a hurry. After a potential exposure, Joseph Bruce learned firsthand how contract tracing worked. "The first postal contact tracing at headquarters, I did myself," he said. "We had somebody who tested positive ... who had been in the building that last day and so I actually spent the next day calling people and ... I was calling from home that night trying to get hold of people." Bruce told them, "You could have been exposed. ... Talk to your doctor. Stay away from people, if you can." Despite his efforts to be reassuring, some contacts were upset by the news. "None of us had seen a case of COVID at that point," said Bruce, "all we had was a list from the CDC of symptoms."⁵³

As acting vice president of Employee Resource Management, Linda DeCarlo was intimately involved in developing the contact tracing program. "Nobody knew," she said, "What do I need to ask? How do I interview employees? What data do I need to track to be able to spot trends?"⁵⁴ The occupational health team developed a comprehensive program that involved exposed employees, their managers, and HR staff at the district level. It included an action plan, a sample script, checklist, guidance for self-monitoring, and a chart for tracking symptoms.

The medical team — which consisted of physicians, nurses, and other health care professionals — partnered with IT to build tracking and reporting systems. In normal times, the health team assisted employees with reasonable-accommodation requests, conducted employment screenings, fitness-for-duty exams, and organized workplace health fairs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the team became a vital source of information for employees and, importantly, performed contact tracing.

Demands on the medical staff escalated as the pandemic progressed. In July 2020, there were just 116 Postal Service nurses nationwide for a workforce of more than 600,000. To augment the occupational health team, the Postal Service temporarily re-hired nurses who had recently retired and put out a call for postal employees with medical training to temporarily join the team. To be eligible for the assignment, employees had to be a licensed nurse, paramedic, emergency medical technician, or other medical worker.

Said DeCarlo: "We asked anybody who had experience either as an EMT, a nurse — all of our city carriers and rural carriers, and plant workers all had other lives and they had other interests. Some were CPR certified that we didn't know about. And as a district or an area needed some assistance or backup, they were able to call on these folks and have them temporarily detailed into HR."⁵⁵ In all, 631 qualified postal employees volunteered for this special assignment. Detailed employees were assigned a variety of duties related to case management and communications that did not include administering medical care. This included contact tracing, answering questions from postmasters and other managers on COVID-19 cases, contacting local health departments, and reviewing employees' medical documentation.

DeCarlo believed that the pandemic showed the rest of the Postal Service the value that the occupational health team brought to the table. "Most time you only think you need an OHNA [occupational health nurse administrator] if you've got an injury comp claim...or you want to schedule a fitness for duty. You think of them

⁵¹ U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General, "Employee Safety — Postal Service COVID-19 Response," op cit., 1.

⁵² Storey interview, 17.

⁵³ Bruce interview, 7.

⁵⁴ DeCarlo interview, 8.

⁵⁵ DeCarlo interview, 8.

as a flu shot team,” she said. “But this was the team that was on the ground, talking to employees in facilities that were scared or sick, or had lost loved ones, and their value really stood out.”⁵⁶

Essential workers, essential work

*When Americans see letter carriers and the daily mail, it offers a measure of reassurance in these unprecedented times that the nation continues to function.*⁵⁷

Fredric Rolando, president of the National Association of Letter Carriers, May 2020

In March 2020, to reduce the spread of COVID-19, many state and local governments implemented travel restrictions. On March 23, the Postal Service advised employees that because they provided an essential public service they were exempt from travel restrictions imposed by state and local governments. Employees were advised to carry their official identification while on the job and when traveling to and from work. If they happened to be stopped by law enforcement officials enforcing travel restrictions, they were instructed to show their USPS ID badge, explain the nature of their work, and their reason for travel. To provide additional documentation, Chief Operating Officer David Williams issued a letter that postal workers could carry with them. It advised law enforcement officials, “the bearer of this letter with an accompanying U.S. Postal Service identification badge provides essential services of the federal government.” (See Appendix F, “Essential Service Provider Letter.”)

These services became even more essential during the pandemic. An important tool for limiting the spread of COVID was testing. Identifying infected individuals early in the course of their illness enabled them to isolate themselves, reducing the chance that they would infect others. In the early days of the pandemic, testing supplies were limited and patients often had to wait days to be tested. Testing was conducted at health care clinics, pharmacies, and at many mobile testing facilities set up across the nation. Specimens had to be sent to a laboratory for analysis and results took days.

The Postal Service played an important role in delivering supplies to testing sites and also in delivering specimens to laboratories. In March 2020, the Postal Service formed a cross-functional COVID strike team to facilitate the movement of COVID related materials through the mail. The team partnered with organizations and companies to offer new shipping solutions. For example, one early provider of COVID test kits was the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in partnership with Rutgers University. In May 2020, the strike team worked with the school to send out three different test kits in the New York City area using Endicia PC Postage USPS Returns Priority Mail labels and First-Class Mail labels. Long-standing international regulations required shipments of biological specimens to adhere to specific labeling and packaging standards. The strike team helped create a new label that combined the postage label with the required “Category B (UN-3373)” markings, thereby streamlining the mailing process. Meanwhile, stand-up talks helped reassure employees that COVID test materials in the mail posed no risk to their health.

The Postal Service also played a critical role in the 2020 presidential election, as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic caused many U.S. states to expand voting by mail (see “Delivering democracy,” at right). And in addition to its regular delivery of benefit checks, prescription and over-the-counter medications, and important documents, during the COVID-19 pandemic the Postal Service performed another vital function: delivering direct payments from the U.S. Government to millions of Americans nationwide. In 2020 and 2021, the federal

Delivering democracy

In 2020, many Americans believed that voting by mail was the safest alternative for voting during the pandemic. As the November 3 election drew near, the Postal Service put extraordinary measures in place to ensure the prompt processing and delivery of election mail, including authorizing extra transportation and employee overtime, extra deliveries and collections, running collections and mail processing on Sundays, and using Priority Mail Express to get ballots to election boards. In addition, letter carriers were instructed to check every residential mailbox in the country for ballots from October 26 through October 31.

The 2020 presidential election had the highest turnout in U.S. history, with a record 159 million votes cast. Nearly 67 percent of all citizens aged 18 and older voted — the highest percentage in more than a century. Forty-three percent of voters cast their ballots by mail — another record. On average, the Postal Service delivered ballots to voters in 2.1 days and delivered ballots from voters to election officials in just 1.6 days.

⁵⁶ DeCarlo interview, 9.

⁵⁷ “Essential Service in Uncertain Times,” *The Postal Record*, May 2020, 11.

government issued \$931 billion in direct payments to Americans, to ease the financial stress caused by the pandemic; at least 80 million of the payments were sent by mail.⁵⁸

Delivery challenges

*In some of the areas that were really, really hit hard ... we just didn't have enough people to deliver the mail every day. And so we had to [say] "Alright, well, you get out what you can today, but I want the data and the visibility around what didn't get delivered and where we didn't go. And those are the places we go first tomorrow."*⁵⁹

Kristin Seaver, former chief information officer and executive vice president, January 2022

During the pandemic, postal workers continued their vital work of keeping the nation connected. For many American families hunkering down in their homes, the daily appearance of their letter carrier took on a new significance. The sight of familiar postal employees making their rounds was a small bit of normalcy in a world turned upside down. For many Americans, the mail was a literal lifeline. Rather than risking infection by venturing to a store, many people chose to have vital supplies delivered to their home. Prescription medications, clothing, home goods, office supplies, and even groceries were delivered directly to doorsteps. Online purchases drove package volumes to unprecedented levels. The Postal Service delivered 7.3 billion parcels in 2020, up from 6.2 billion the previous year.

But not all customers saw their letter carrier as a lifeline. Although there was no evidence that COVID-19 could spread through the mail, some customers viewed both their mail and their letter carrier as possible vectors for infection. Some customers didn't pick up their mail, refused to answer their door, or wanted to check their carrier's temperature before accepting their mail. Carriers were not required to submit to such screenings. Anxious customers were offered solutions, such as a temporary mail receptacle outside their building, holding their mail at the Post Office, or redirecting their mail to another location.

Certain types of mail required a customer's signature, which placed carriers and customers in uncomfortably close proximity. To avoid such close contact, the Postal Service temporarily modified procedures when a signature and identification were needed for delivery. Carriers were instructed to knock rather than ring the customer's doorbell, avoiding frequently touched areas. If identification was needed, the customer was asked to hold their ID up to the window. The carrier then entered the customer's first initial and last name on their handheld delivery device or hardcopy PS Form 3811 or 3849. In place of the customer's signature, they printed their own initials, route number, and the notation "C19." Rather than handing the item directly to the customer, they left the item in the mail receptacle or appropriate location by the door.

As mail for shuttered businesses began to accumulate, local Post Offices were swamped with requests to hold mail, change addresses, and provide alternate delivery methods. Some business owners were overwhelmed by the suddenness of COVID lockdowns. "If you're a small business, the last thing you're thinking of is, 'Oh, before I shut down my livelihood, I'm going to notify the Postal Service to put a hold on my mail,'" said Steve Monteith, chief customer and marketing officer and

International mail disruptions

The global pandemic caused major disruptions in the exchange of mail with other nations. In the early months of 2020, many foreign post operators were unable to process or deliver mail from the United States. More than 70 percent of countries reported service disruptions due to COVID-19. Initially the Postal Service continued to accept and process mail destined for impacted countries, intending to hold the mail in-network until mail service was restored. But on April 3, 2020, the Postal Service suspended acceptance of international mail to impacted destinations.

The inability of foreign posts to accept mail from the U.S. was not the only challenge to international mail service. Widespread flight cancellations and restrictions due to COVID-19 resulted in the Postal Service being unable to place mail on international flights. In order to keep the mail moving, the Postal Service returned to sea transportation for the first time since 2007. In February 2020, mail departed Los Angeles and San Francisco for Shanghai. On April 20, a ship left New York for the port of Rotterdam in the Netherlands, with mail for European nations. The diversion of international mail from air to sea remained in effect until sufficient air transportation resumed.

⁵⁸ U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Stimulus Checks: Direct Payments to Individuals during the COVID-19 Pandemic," GAO-22-106044, June 29, 2022, at <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-22-106044> (accessed August 15, 2022). See also U.S. Postal Service, "In the Mail," *Link* news site, April 23, 2020, <https://link.usps.com/2020/04/23/in-the-mail-4/>, and "Stimulus Checks," April 12, 2021, <https://link.usps.com/2021/04/12/stimulus-checks/> (accessed August 18, 2022).

⁵⁹ Seaver interview, 7.

executive vice president. “Well, they didn’t, so we extended hold mail.”⁶⁰ Instead of holding the mail for 10 days, the time was extended to 30 days. After that time, unclaimed mail was endorsed “Moved, Left No Address” and returned to the senders.

The greatest challenge to prompt mail delivery was the trifecta of fewer available employees, increased parcels, and diminished transportation. During 2020, nearly one-fifth of the postal workforce had to quarantine at some point. “Everything changed,” recalled Joshua Colin. “We went from reliability, efficiency, understanding that we could reach every location, to worrying about 30 to 40 percent employee availability in a plant.”⁶¹ Delays in processing and delivering the mail were exacerbated by disruptions in the transportation network. Commercial airlines were especially hard-hit by the pandemic, and with fewer passengers, many flights were cancelled. Mail intended for those flights was diverted to chartered flights or to the ground, but ground transportation was also delayed by a shortage of truck drivers.

Meanwhile, lower employee availability put more strain on available workers. When letter carriers were unable to work due to COVID-19, some routes temporarily went undelivered. “I had 40 percent coverage on certain routes and maybe in the communities in certain ZIP Codes, they got half the routes covered on one day,” said Colin, adding “some routes didn’t have any coverage for multiple days out of a week.”⁶² Kristin Seaver also acknowledged that in a few hard-hit areas, there just weren’t enough people to deliver the mail every day. She said it was “one of the harder decisions. ... [telling employees] get out what you can today, but I want the data and the visibility around what *didn’t* get delivered and where we *didn’t* go. And those are the places we go first tomorrow.”⁶³

Public support for the Postal Service

*The power of simply being there — of showing the public that someone they rely on is getting the job done — should not be underestimated.*⁶⁴

Fredric Rolando, president of the National Association of Letter Carriers, May 2020

In the spring of 2020, as many of the nation’s roads and airways remained silent due to stay-at-home orders, postal employees continued serving their communities by delivering vital communications and supplies. Postal workers going about their business was a reassuring sight for many customers isolated by the pandemic. Customers showed their appreciation by leaving thank-you notes at mailboxes, creating chalk drawings on driveways and sidewalks, and posting yard signs, thanking postal workers for continuing to deliver their mail. The messages ranged from a simple “thank you” to the more poetic, like “some superheroes wear satchels.” For postal employees, these messages were a great comfort and offered a much-needed boost in morale.

Kristin Seaver recalled: “It was a dark week — we had lost a lot of employees ... and somebody from the field ... sent ... a photo. It was one of the first chalk drawings on the sidewalk thanking the Postal Service employees. ... You’ve probably seen ... that blue heart with the stamp on it. And I remember it was late at night when I got it, and it just really solidified that, you know, we’re doing the best we can, and we’re going to get through this.”⁶⁵ As thank-you notes and tributes poured into Post Offices across the country, postal employees began sharing the images with their colleagues. “We started using those images in our daily brief,” said Seaver. “And it just became something that people really were motivated by.” She added, “In a series of ups and downs, you could be pretty low, but then you could be pulled out of that lowness with some really positive, powerful things.”⁶⁶

To showcase the support the organization and its employees received during the pandemic, the Postal Service created an online photo gallery on the Blue page. The Postal Service also shared a series of 30-second videos on its social media channels, highlighting the heartfelt messages from customers.

The public also showed its support with a grassroots campaign to “save the Post Office” by buying more stamps. At the height of the lockdowns, in April 2020, national news media reported that people were rushing to

⁶⁰ Monteith interview, 7.

⁶¹ Oral history interview with Dr. Joshua Colin, November 22, 2021, 3, *USPS COVID-19 Oral History Project*, in files of USPS Historian.

⁶² Colin interview, 6.

⁶³ Seaver interview, 7.

⁶⁴ “Essential Service in Uncertain Times,” *The Postal Record*, May 2020, 11.

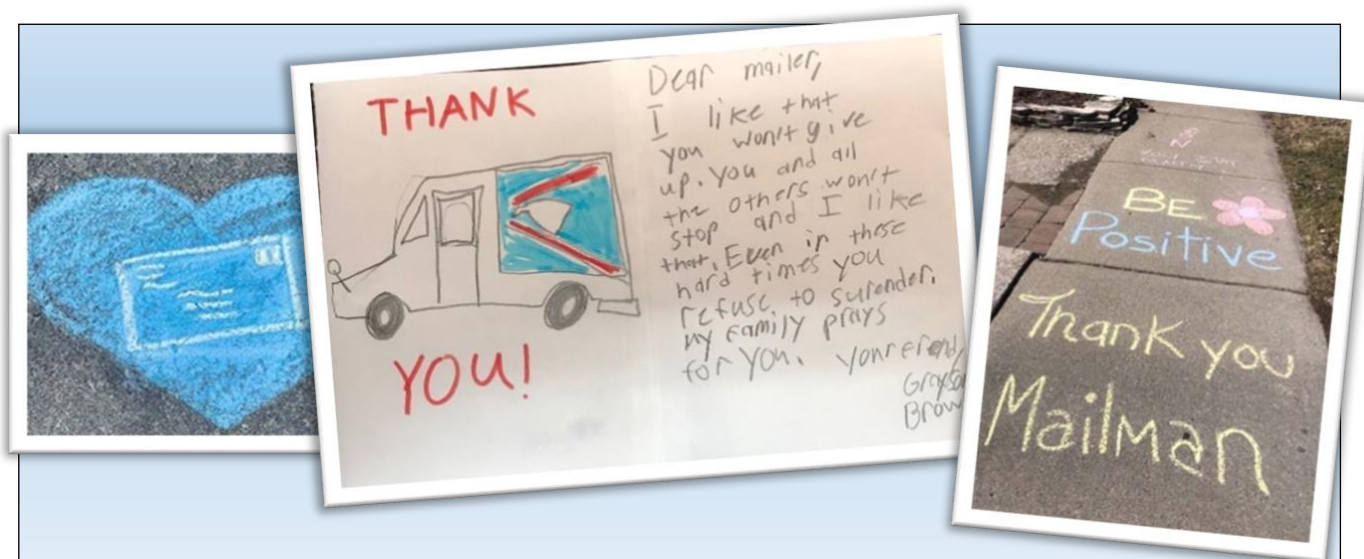
⁶⁵ Seaver, 8.

⁶⁶ Seaver, 9.

buy stamps to save the Postal Service.⁶⁷ The idea gained enough traction that it found its way into a *Saturday Night Live* skit, in which a fortune teller in 2019 predicted that in 2020, one of her clients would “ask everyone in [her] life to buy stamps, and they do. They all buy the stamps.”⁶⁸ Monteith recalled, “We went from an average of 60,000 orders a week ... to ... one week we were up over 200,000 orders.”⁶⁹

Customers also showed their support for the Postal Service in a series of public opinion surveys. In a 2020 poll conducted by the Pew Research Center at the beginning of the COVID lockdowns, the Postal Service topped the list of federal agencies viewed favorably by the American public. The results showed an overwhelming 91 percent of respondents had a favorable view of the Postal Service, higher than any other federal agency.

In June 2020, the Harris Poll ranked the Postal Service first in overall performance during the coronavirus pandemic, topping the nation’s largest companies. The survey was conducted between January and April, just as many businesses curtailed operations and many Americans began sheltering at home. It asked respondents to rank 100 essential businesses on four key measures: resolve, integrity, responsiveness, and permanence. The Postal Service ranked No. 1 overall, ahead of companies such as Clorox, Google, UPS, and Walmart. Storey recalled, “That was a proud moment. ... To be recognized as number one in [the Harris Poll] was very good — good for our morale and good for the organization.”⁷⁰



Tributes to postal workers, 2020

In the spring of 2020, customers left thank-you notes at mailboxes, created chalk drawings on driveways and sidewalks, and posted yard signs, thanking postal workers for continuing to deliver their mail during the pandemic. The spontaneous outpouring of support boosted employees' morale.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Austin Horn, “Hoping To Save The Postal Service, People Rush To Buy Stamps,” NPR.org, April 14, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/04/14/834336341/hoping-to-save-the-postal-service-people-rush-to-buy-stamps>; and Brittany Anas, “People Are Buying Extra Stamps To Try To Save USPS,” Simplemost.com, April 14, 2020, <https://www.simplemost.com/people-are-buying-stamps-to-save-the-post-office/> (accessed August 18, 2022). For a timeline of state lockdowns, see the CDC’s paper “Timing of State and Territorial COVID-19 Stay-at-Home Orders and Changes in Population Movement — United States, March 1–May 31, 2020, at <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/pdfs/mm6935a2-H.pdf> (accessed August 8, 2022).

⁶⁸ “Madame Vivelda,” *Saturday Night Live*, S46 E4, NBC.com, October 24, 2020, <https://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/madame-vivelda/4254864> (accessed August 18, 2022).

⁶⁹ Monteith interview, 7.

⁷⁰ Storey interview, 10.

Going the extra mile for customers

*Your love for your neighbors lifts us and the entire nation.*⁷¹

President Donald Trump to letter carrier Kyle West, May 2020

Some postal workers went above and beyond to care for their customers in need. When Cincinnati letter carrier Kyle West learned that one of his homebound customers desperately needed toilet paper, West gladly gave him a roll. Then West decided to reach out to about 400 of his customers who he knew were elderly. He distributed a note with his phone number: “If you are at risk and need help getting essential items, let me know. I will do what I can to help. Sincerely, Mailman Kyle.”⁷² West heard from dozens of his customers with urgent needs, and even more who offered to donate the much-needed supplies — including toilet paper, milk, paper towels and soap — that he distributed while delivering his route. The story of his inspiring actions made national news headlines, and he was recognized for his service by President Donald Trump at a White House ceremony.

Another Ohio letter carrier, Kathleen Budzik, learned that an elderly couple on her route was unable to buy groceries. Before going home, Budzik stopped at the store and delivered groceries to them the next morning. “We got a knock on the door and Kathy was standing there with a bag of groceries,” the husband said. “It warmed our hearts up to see that somebody had actually cared for other people.” Said Budzik, “The smallest little thing you can do for someone goes so far.”⁷³

Similar service was performed by letter carrier Agnes Small in California. She offered to buy groceries for some of her customers who lived in a retirement community that enforced strict isolation. A few of her customers gave her shopping lists; she bought the items and delivered the supplies to her customers at the end of her workday.⁷⁴



President Trump and Letter Carrier Kyle West, 2020

Cincinnati letter carrier Kyle West went to extraordinary lengths to make sure his elderly customers got essential items during the lockdown. He was honored by President Donald Trump at a White House ceremony on May 1, 2020.

Vaccines and variants

*The delivery of two commercial vaccines in less than a year is nothing short of miraculous.*⁷⁵

David Shulkin, MD, January 2021

The search for a safe and effective vaccine began almost as soon as COVID-19 reached pandemic status. The search got a major boost in May 2020 when President Trump launched Operation Warp Speed, a partnership between the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Defense that aimed to accelerate the development and distribution of a COVID-19 vaccine, with doses available by January 2021. The goal was widely criticized as unrealistic — traditionally, vaccines took 10 or more years to develop.⁷⁶ The accomplishment of that goal in less than a year was unprecedented. In December 2020, two of the vaccines

⁷¹ President Donald Trump, “Remarks Honoring the Hard Work, Heroism, and Hope Demonstrated by American Citizens During the Coronavirus Pandemic,” May 1, 2020, *The American Presidency Project*, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/341910> (accessed August 18, 2022).

⁷² U.S. Postal Service, “Sincerely, Mailman Kyle,” *Link* news site, May 12, 2020, <https://link.usps.com/2020/05/11/sincerely-mailman-kyle/> (accessed August 18, 2022).

⁷³ Mike Brookbank, “Mail carrier makes special delivery of groceries to elderly couple in need,” *News5Cleveland.com*, April 1, 2020, <https://www.news5cleveland.com/news/continuing-coverage/coronavirus/mail-carriers-role-during-coronavirus-outbreak-evolves> (accessed August 18, 2022).

⁷⁴ “Going Above and Beyond,” *The Postal Record*, July 2020, 14.

⁷⁵ David Shulkin, MD, “What Health Care Can Learn from Operation Warp Speed,” *NEJM Catalyst*, January 21, 2021, <https://catalyst.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/CAT.21.0001> (accessed August 18, 2022).

⁷⁶ U.S. Government Accountability Office, “Operation Warp Speed: Accelerated COVID-19 Vaccine Development Status and Efforts to Address Manufacturing Challenges,” GAO-21-319, February 11, 2021, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-319> (accessed August 18, 2022).

under development — by Pfizer and Moderna — were approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for emergency use. On December 14, a nurse in New York became the first American outside a clinical trial to receive a COVID-19 vaccine.

The availability of vaccines in early 2021 offered the nation hope that there was light at the end of the tunnel. Initial supplies of vaccine were limited, and essential workers were prioritized for vaccination. As essential employees, most postal workers were eligible for vaccination in the second group, Phase 1B — after health care workers and residents of long-term care facilities, but ahead of the general population. The timing of the vaccine rollout varied by state and county. In some areas, front-line postal workers were eligible for vaccination in January or February 2021, but in others, they needed to wait until March. Some administrative staff, meanwhile, were first eligible for vaccination in April.

The impact of vaccinations on the Postal Service was pronounced. “When the vaccines became available,” said David Ellis, “we started to see evidence of declines of positive cases.”⁷⁷ In January 2021, the Postal Service had as many as 18,000 employees out of work daily due to COVID, but that number began dropping as more employees got vaccinated. For COVID command this was welcome news. “That was like, ‘Alright, we’re going to get through this — we’re starting to see it drop a little bit,’” said Simon Storey.⁷⁸ The Postal Service urged all employees who wished to be vaccinated to do so as soon as possible, but never required employees to get vaccinated.⁷⁹



Rural carrier receiving vaccine, 2021

The availability of vaccines in early 2021 meant fewer positive cases of COVID and less employee absences. Here a Florida rural carrier pulls up his sleeve for a shot of vaccine.

While vaccines helped flatten the curve of new infections, they did not eradicate COVID. Some Americans were resistant to getting vaccinated. And “COVID fatigue”— weariness of the restrictions and stress caused by the pandemic — and the availability of vaccines led many jurisdictions to relax restrictions designed to prevent the spread, which led to a resurgence of COVID in some locations. Meanwhile, the virus that caused COVID-19 continued to mutate, and some of the mutations spawned new variants.

During the summer of 2021, the Delta variant became the dominant strain in the U.S. and kicked off a new wave of infections. As the Delta wave subsided in the fall, the CDC recommended boosters for adults and initial vaccinations for some children. Then WHO identified a new variant, Omicron, as an emerging threat. The first case of the Omicron variant was detected in the U.S. on December 1, 2021. More contagious than earlier variants, Omicron spread quickly and by December 20, 2021, was reportedly the dominant strain in the U.S.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Ellis interview, 6.

⁷⁸ Storey interview, 11.

⁷⁹ On September 9, 2021, President Joe Biden issued an executive order requiring vaccination of all federal workers, with certain exceptions. It was unclear if the order included the Postal Service, which was legally bound to negotiate any changes in working conditions with its labor unions. On November 5, 2021, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued an emergency temporary standard (ETS) that ordered employees in organizations with more than 100 workers to either be vaccinated against COVID-19 or be tested weekly. The ETS was widely challenged in court and temporarily halted from taking effect. Ultimately, the Supreme Court agreed to hear arguments on the order and OSHA extended the compliance deadline until January 10, 2022. On January 4, the Postal Service requested a temporary variance to the ETS and a 120-day extension to the deadline. The Postal Service also requested an interim order that would allow the organization to continue using its current COVID-19 mitigation policies and protocols while the legal validity of the ETS was challenged in federal court. On January 13, 2022, the Supreme Court struck down the ETS, stating in part that the Secretary of Labor “lacked authority to impose the mandate” (see *NFIB v. OSHA*, January 13, 2022, at https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/21a244_hgci.pdf).

⁸⁰ Travis Caldwell and Claire Colbert, “Omicron is now the dominant strain of coronavirus in the US, according to the CDC,” CNN.com, December 21, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/12/20/health/us-coronavirus-monday/index.html> (accessed August 18, 2022).

Delivering America's COVID-19 test kits

*There are few assignments the Postal Service has received that better exemplify our public service mission than the request of the Biden administration to deliver America's COVID-19 test kits.*⁸¹

Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, March 2022

In December 2021, to head off another wave of COVID infections, the Biden Administration pushed for increased testing options. This included sending free rapid test kits directly to American households. The FDA had authorized at-home COVID tests for use by prescription in November 2020, and for sale over the counter the following month, but supplies were limited. As the Omicron variant of virus spread in December 2021, the demand for at-home COVID tests overwhelmed the supply.

Just days before Christmas, the White House contacted Postmaster General Louis DeJoy to see if the Postal Service would be able to deliver half a billion COVID tests to American households within just a few weeks. DeJoy answered a resounding “yes” — not only could the Postal Service deliver the tests, but it could accept, process, and pack the orders as well. DeJoy, who joined the Postal Service after a successful career in the logistics industry, told *Federal News Network*, “We had never done picking and packing and order management and so forth within the organization to that extent. That was my whole prior life.”⁸²

The Postal Service pivoted from the peak holiday delivery season to focus on the delivery of the test kits. Quick negotiations with the American Postal Workers Union allowed many seasonal workers to be reassigned from their holiday roles to work on test kit fulfillment. Newly acquired annex facilities were reconfigured to ensure the workspace and storage capacity could handle the influx of millions of test kits. In one week, 2,000 employees were trained to fulfill and label packages containing COVID tests.

The Postal Service's IT team — led by chief information officer Pritha Mehra and chief technology officer Scott Bombaugh — quickly created an easy-to-use website for the public to order test kits at www.covidtests.gov. Mehra later said, “We first looked at our own Postal Store, which is our storefront for ... [ordering] stamps and shipping supplies. We geared it up, we kept throwing servers at it — hundreds of servers.”⁸³ A toll-free phone



Packing and delivering COVID-19 test kits, 2022

In January 2022, letter carriers began delivering free COVID-19 test kits to U.S. households upon request. This was the first time in history that the Postal Service partnered with the White House and other federal agencies on a nationwide emergency response mailing.

⁸¹ U.S. Postal Service, “COVID-19 tests,” *Link* news site, March 3, 2022, <https://link.usps.com/2022/03/02/covid-19-tests-2/> (accessed August 18, 2022).

⁸² Jory Heckman, “‘We rocked it.’ How USPS pulled off delivering 380 million COVID-19 tests,” *Federal News Network*, May 30, 2022, <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/workforce/2022/05/we-rocked-it-how-usps-pulled-off-delivering-380-million-covid-19-tests/> (accessed August 18, 2022).

⁸³ Amazon Web Services, “AWS Washington DC Summit 2022 – Keynote with Max Peterson,” YouTube.com, AWS Events, May 26, 2022, https://youtu.be/O2_3RaXv6bY (accessed August 18, 2022).

number was established for those who lacked internet access or who needed help ordering. Test kits were offered to every U.S. household, including those in U.S. territories and at military and diplomatic addresses overseas.

The website went live on January 18, 2022, and the Postal Service began fulfilling and shipping out orders as soon as test kits became available. In the first six hours after the website went live, the Postal Service received orders for 42 million tests. On average, it took 1.2 days for the Postal Service to deliver a test kit package once it entered the mailstream — in part because of the strategic siting of the Postal Service’s nationwide fulfillment hubs. On February 22, the Postal Service delivered more than 6 million COVID-19 test kit packages — the highest single-day volume delivered since shipping began at the end of January. After the initial offer of four free tests in January, Americans were offered additional opportunities to order free tests — four more in March, and eight more beginning in April. In April 2022, President Joe Biden called the Postal Service’s test kit delivery “an impressive turnaround for an unprecedented task.”⁸⁴

Impact of the pandemic on USPS finances and legislative relief

*If you look at 2020 as a whole ... between the pandemic and the election, it was an incredible way of demonstrating the criticality of the Postal Service's infrastructure.*⁸⁵

Kristin Seaver, former chief information officer and executive vice president, January 2022

The COVID-19 pandemic had a severe impact on the global economy. Many businesses ceased operating — some permanently — due to quarantines, shelter-in-place orders, and travel restrictions. In 2020, as much U.S. economic activity ground to a halt, the combined revenue from First-Class Mail and Marketing Mail fell by \$3.1 billion. In fiscal year 2021, Marketing Mail volume increased slightly — in part because of political and election mail during the 2020 election season — while First-Class Mail volume continued to decline. Meanwhile, parcel volume surged as more and more Americans turned to online shopping. Revenue from packages increased by approximately \$5.8 billion in 2020, and \$3.5 billion in 2021. Overall, the Postal Service’s operating revenue increased by 2.8 percent in 2020, and 5.3 percent in 2021.

Still, the Postal Service experienced net losses in both 2020 and 2021, due partly to expenses related to the pandemic. These included increased transportation costs, the purchase and management of PPE, the cost of sanitizing work areas, and increased labor costs, including for sick leave and overtime. Cumulatively, nearly 20 percent of the postal workforce needed to quarantine at some point during 2020, leading to increased use of paid leave and overtime. The cost of air transportation increased due to the cancellation of commercial flights, which required the diversion of mail to more costly chartered flights. The surge in parcel volume increased highway transportation costs. As of September 2020, the Postal Service reported about \$744 million in pandemic-related spending. This included \$204 million spent on safety and cleaning supplies, \$124 million spent on transportation expenses, and the greatest expense — the cost of COVID-related leave — \$402 million.⁸⁶

Protecting the public during the pandemic

Since 1872, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service has pursued swindlers and scam artists attempting to defraud American consumers via the U.S. Mail. During the COVID-19 pandemic, fraudsters employed an array of scams to cheat people out of their money. Most of the ploys were variations of time-tested tricks, like phishing emails, hoax calls, and investment scams. But some were unique to the pandemic, including the sale of counterfeit vaccination cards and fake cures for COVID-19, contact tracing scams designed to steal victims’ personal information, and PPE supply scams. Fraudsters also illegally pocketed millions in federal funds that were intended to protect American workers and the U.S. economy.

In September 2021, postal inspectors arrested a New York man on pandemic-related charges of mail fraud and identity theft. Among other crimes, the man admitted to using stolen identification to make bogus unemployment insurance claims earning him \$131,560 in pandemic-related benefits. He was sentenced to 70 months in prison and ordered to pay restitution. Postal inspectors also helped nab a Florida man who bought himself a Lamborghini and other luxury goods after fraudulently obtaining \$3.9 million in COVID-related aid from the U.S. Government.

⁸⁴ President Joe Biden, “Remarks by President Biden at Signing of H.R. 3076, the ‘Postal Service Reform Act of 2022,’” April 6, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/04/06/remarks-by-president-biden-at-signing-of-h-r-3076-the-postal-service-reform-act-of-2022/> (accessed August 18, 2022).

⁸⁵ Seaver interview, 9.

⁸⁶ U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General, “Impact of Pandemic on Postal Service Finances,” Report Number 20-257-R21, March 29, 2021, 1, <https://www.uspsouig.gov/sites/default/files/document-library-files/2021/20-257-R21.pdf> (accessed Aug 18,

To lessen the impact of the pandemic on the U.S. economy, Congress swiftly passed an unprecedented \$2.2 trillion stimulus package. Signed into law on March 27, 2020, the CARES Act sent direct payments of up to \$1,200 to millions of Americans. The CARES Act, as amended in December 2020 by the *Consolidated Appropriations Act*, acknowledged the extraordinary costs borne by the Postal Service during the pandemic and authorized the agency to receive up to \$10 billion from the U.S. Treasury to fund operating expenses.⁸⁷ As of July 29, 2021, all \$10 billion had been received. In March 2021, the President signed the *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021*, which included \$570 million in funding for COVID-19 related leave taken from March 12 through September 30, 2021, for all federal employees, including postal employees. The Postal Service received \$269.7 million in reimbursements under this law.

While these laws provided necessary relief, even more was needed. The Postal Service had been in a financial crisis for more than a decade, reporting net losses every year since 2007, in part because of a 2006 law that required it to aggressively pre-fund future retiree health care benefits. Since 2010, the Postal Service had asked Congress for postal reform legislation, but year after year, postal reform bills had stalled in committee. On March 8, 2022, after more than a decade of debate, Congress passed the *Postal Service Reform Act of 2022* with strong bipartisan support. The legislation was a key component of Postmaster General Louis DeJoy's Delivering for America plan, a 10-year strategic plan to return the Postal Service to financial sustainability and service excellence. Some legislators pointed to the Delivering for America plan as key to winning their support for the act. But it's also true that the pandemic highlighted the critical role that the Postal Service played in the life of the nation. Upon signing the act into law on April 6, President Joe Biden stated:

*The Postal Service is fundamental to our economy, to our democracy, to our health, and the very sense of who we are as a nation. ... This bill recognizes the Postal Service is a public service, and we're ensuring that it can continue to serve all Americans for generations to come.*⁸⁸

COVID command disbanded

*We are certainly right now in this country out of the pandemic phase.*⁸⁹

Dr. Anthony Fauci, April 2022

After peaking in January 2022, when the 7-day average case count exceeded 800,000, new COVID cases began to decline. On May 12, President Biden marked a somber milestone. He ordered flags to be flown at half-staff in "memory of the one million American lives lost to COVID-19."⁹⁰ Worldwide, deaths exceeded 6 million.

In March 2022, with the number of COVID-19 cases in decline, the Postal Service ended its mandatory face-covering policy for employees. The 5-day-per-week telework policy ended on April 18, 2022. By mutual agreement, the remaining COVID-19 MOUs signed with the unions, scheduled to expire on May 6, were not extended. At the same time, the Postal Service ended its liberal leave policy.

On May 20, 2022, the COVID-19 Response Command Team was disbanded. The Postal Service continued tracking cases of COVID-19 and provided regular reports to stakeholders, including unions and associations. Close contact tracing and return-to-work protocols for infected and exposed employees remained in effect and the Postal Service continued to encourage social distancing.

2022). The expanded leave options available from April 1 through December 31, 2020, authorized by the *Families First Coronavirus Act*, were USPS-funded.

⁸⁷ The CARES Act provided that the Postal Service could borrow up to \$10 billion to fund operating expenses associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially, funding was stalled by the Administration; in July 2020 Postmaster General Louis DeJoy stepped in and negotiated an agreement in principle with the Treasury Department on loan terms and conditions. The *Consolidated Appropriations Act* amended the CARES Act to remove the repayment requirement.

⁸⁸ Biden, op cit.

⁸⁹ PBS NewsHour, "Dr. Fauci on why the U.S. is 'out of the pandemic phase,'" Public Broadcasting Service, April 26, 2022, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/dr-fauci-on-why-the-u-s-is-out-of-the-pandemic-phase-2> (accessed August 18, 2022).

⁹⁰ President Joe Biden, "A Proclamation on Remembering the 1,000,000 Americans Lost to COVID-19," May 12, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2022/05/12/a-proclamation-on-remembering-the-1000000-americans-lost-to-covid-19/> (accessed August 18, 2022).

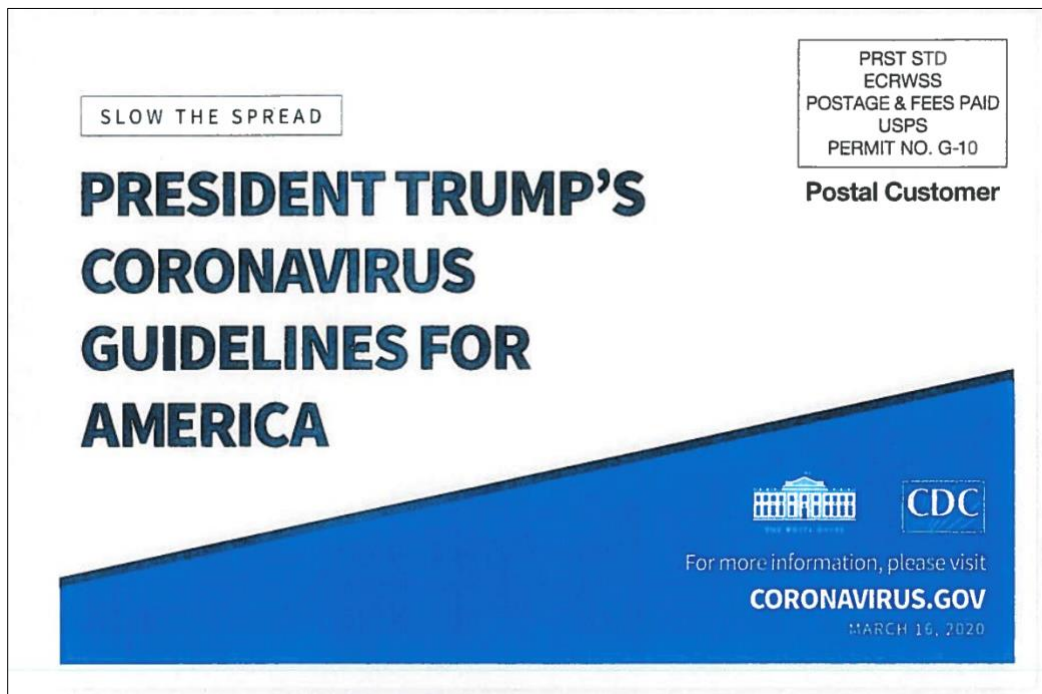
The COVID-19 pandemic lasted far longer than most people could have imagined. When Karen Meehan, an employee at postal headquarters, returned to her L'Enfant Plaza office, she encountered a “surreal” scene. She said:

I felt like a survivor of an apocalypse. Office plants lay brown and dried up, abandoned by their owners. The calendars, all turned to March 2020, marked the day the world shut down. Most everyone thought the return to work would be soon — maybe a couple of weeks. But a couple of weeks turned into a couple of months, then a couple of years, as the pandemic dragged on. Meanwhile, the calendar pages in the building stayed on March 2020, a constant reminder of the day the world “stopped.”⁹¹

HISTORIAN
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE
SEPTEMBER 2022

⁹¹ Karen Meehan, director, USPS International Pricing and Financial Reporting, in email to Steve Kochersperger, senior research analyst, Postal History, May 5, 2022; copy in files of USPS Historian.

Appendix A: Postcard with President's Coronavirus Guidelines



Listen and follow the directions of your **STATE AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES**.

IF YOU FEEL SICK, stay home. Do not go to work.

IF YOUR CHILDREN ARE SICK, keep them at home. Contact your medical provider.

IF YOU ARE AN OLDER PERSON, or have a serious underlying health condition, stay home and away from other people.

If someone in your household has **TESTED POSITIVE**, keep the entire household at home.

EVEN IF YOU ARE YOUNG, OR OTHERWISE HEALTHY, YOU ARE AT RISK AND YOUR ACTIVITIES CAN INCREASE THE RISK FOR OTHERS. IT IS CRITICAL THAT YOU DO YOUR PART TO SLOW THE SPREAD OF THE CORONAVIRUS.

Work or study **FROM HOME** whenever possible.

AVOID SOCIAL GATHERINGS in groups of more than 10 people.

Avoid eating or drinking at bars and restaurants — **USE PICKUP OR DELIVERY OPTIONS**.

AVOID DISCRETIONARY TRAVEL, shopping trips, and social visits.

DO NOT VISIT nursing homes or retirement or long-term care facilities unless to provide critical assistance.

ALWAYS PRACTICE GOOD HYGIENE:

- Wash your hands, especially after touching any frequently used item or surface.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Sneeze or cough into a tissue, or the inside of your elbow.
- Disinfect frequently used items and surfaces as much as possible.

CORONAVIRUS.GOV

Appendix B: Key Dates in COVID-19 Pandemic and Postal Service Response

2020	
Jan. 5	World Health Organization (WHO) reports an unknown virus has caused a cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan, China.
Jan. 6	PMG Megan Brennan agrees to delay retirement until her successor is selected.
Jan. 11	The first death caused by the novel coronavirus is reported in China.
Jan. 13	First case confirmed outside of China.
Jan. 17	CDC begins screening passengers on flights from Wuhan at San Francisco, New York City, and Los Angeles.
Jan. 20	CDC confirms the first U.S. laboratory-confirmed case of COVID-19 in the U.S. from samples taken in Washington state.
Jan. 29	The White House Coronavirus Task Force is established.
Jan. 31	WHO declares a Global Public Health Emergency; U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services declares a public health emergency.
Feb. 10	USPS suspends guarantee on Priority Mail Express International to China and Hong Kong due to flight cancellations and restrictions.
Feb. 11	WHO announces the official name for the disease: COVID-19, short for “coronavirus disease 2019.” USPS advises employees to wash hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer.
Feb. 29	The first death from COVID-19 in the U.S. is reported by officials in Washington state.
Mar. 1	First postal worker tests positive for coronavirus, near Seattle.
Mar. 4	Daily cleaning protocols for postal facilities are updated.
Mar. 9	PMG Brennan urges employees, “If you are sick, stay home and get well.”
Mar. 11	WHO declares a global pandemic.
Mar. 13	President Trump declares a nationwide emergency and issues a travel ban on non-U.S. citizens entering U.S. from Europe.
Mar. 15	U.S. states begin to shut down to prevent the spread of COVID-19. New York City public schools shut down; Ohio calls for restaurants and bars to close.
Mar. 17	USPS restricts business-related travel. USPS instructs its vehicle operators to clean frequently touched surfaces in their vehicles if operators had COVID symptoms.
Mar. 18	President Trump signs the <i>Families First Coronavirus Response Act</i> into law, expanding USPS-funded paid sick leave for employees from April 1 through December 31. Telework becomes a 5-day a week option for many USPS administrative employees. USPS provides employees with “Guidance on Social Gatherings,” including avoiding “gatherings of more than 10 people” and “close contact (within 6 feet) with other people to the degree possible.”
Mar. 19	California issues statewide stay-at-home order. USPS temporarily modifies delivery procedures for mail requiring a customer’s signature to facilitate social distancing.
Mar. 20	New York orders all non-essential businesses to close as the number of COVID-19 cases in the state exceeds 7,000. PMG Brennan creates USPS COVID-19 Response Command Team, taking top executives out of their official positions to focus full-time on pandemic response.
Mar. 21	USPS begins delivering “President Trump’s Coronavirus Guidelines for America” postcards to all 138 million residential addresses in the nation.
Mar. 25	U.S. COVID-19 death toll surpasses 1,000. A New York letter carrier becomes the first postal worker known to die from COVID.
Mar. 26	USPS provides managers and carriers with letters for customers concerned about accepting mail, with information on alternative delivery options.
Mar. 27	President Trump signs CARES Act into law, which authorizes USPS to borrow up to \$10 billion from U.S. Treasury for COVID-related operating expenses. USPS provides “Essential Service Provider” letter to facilitate employee travel in areas with state and local travel restrictions.
Mar. 28	USPS extends hold time for mail for closed businesses from 10 days to 30 days.
Mar. 29	U.S. death toll surpasses 3,000.
April 1–30	Unemployment rate reaches 14.8 percent, the highest rate since data collection began in 1948.
April 4	U.S. death toll surpasses 10,000.
April 9	PMG Brennan advises House Oversight and Reform Committee that USPS may run out of money before the end of FY2020, as mail volume falls along with the nation’s economic activity. USPS tops Pew Research Center poll of federal agencies.
April 11	U.S. death toll surpasses 24,000. For the first time in U.S. history, all 50 states have simultaneous federal major disaster declarations.
April 14	USPS temporarily extends the timeframes for when a mailpiece will be returned to sender, to 30 days.
April 20	USPS begins processing and delivering an estimated 60 million stimulus payments from the U.S. Treasury Department to U.S. households nationwide. USPS establishes COVID-19 Supplies Command Center.
April 21	USPS face covering policy modified, making masks <i>mandatory</i> when required by local or state orders and in postal facilities when social distancing cannot be maintained.
April 23	U.S. death toll surpasses 50,000.
April 27	Nationwide confirmed COVID-19 cases surpass 1 million.

May 1	Letter carrier Kyle West is honored at the White House for extraordinary care of his customers.
May 23	FLSA Special Exempt status granted to FLSA-exempt postmasters through July 23, allowing for overtime pay in certain circumstances.
May 24	U.S. COVID-19 deaths surpass 100,000.
June 5	USPS COVID-19 Command Team transitions from full-time emergency response to ongoing operations, with executives coordinating response as part of their official positions.
June 9	Total U.S. COVID-19 cases exceed 2 million.
June 12	USPS tops The Harris Poll Essential 100 in COVID-19 response.
June 15	Louis DeJoy sworn in as nation's 75 th Postmaster General.
July 29	Treasury Department and Postal Service negotiate an agreement in principle on terms and conditions for loan of funds authorized by the CARES Act.
Nov. 3	Election Day: in the presidential election, a record 43 percent of voters cast their ballots by mail, in part to avoid COVID infection.
Dec. 13	FDA authorizes emergency use of the Pfizer–BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine; the vaccine begins shipment to all 50 states.
Dec. 14	A nurse in New York becomes the first American outside a clinical trial to receive a COVID-19 vaccine.
Dec. 18	FDA authorizes emergency use of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine.
Dec. 27	President Trump signs the <i>Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021</i> , which amends CARES Act to remove repayment requirement for \$10 billion for COVID-related USPS operating expenses.
Dec. 24	An estimated one million people in the U.S. are vaccinated against COVID-19.
2021	
Jan. 20	USPS urges employees to not delay getting vaccinated.
Feb. 15	U.S. COVID deaths surpass 500,000.
Feb. 27	FDA authorizes emergency use of the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine.
Mar. 8	CDC announces that fully vaccinated people can gather indoors without masks.

Mar. 11	<i>American Rescue Plan Act of 2021</i> signed into law by President Biden creates new federally-funded leave category through Sept. 30, 2021: Emergency Federal Employee Leave (EFEL).
Mar. 23	USPS releases Delivering for America plan, its strategic 10-year plan for achieving financial stability and service excellence.
April 27	USPS announces acceleration of key network infrastructure investments ahead of 2021 holiday season to help cope with surge in packages.
June 1	Delta variant becomes dominant strain in the U.S.
July 27	USPS no longer requires fully vaccinated employees to wear face coverings, except where required by local regulations.
Aug. 27	USPS mandatory face covering policy is reinstated to slow the spread of the Delta variant.
Nov. 5	OSHA issues an Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS) requiring that employees in companies with more than 100 workers be vaccinated or subjected to weekly testing.
Dec. 1	First case of Omicron variant confirmed in the U.S.
Dec. 14	U.S. COVID deaths surpass 800,000.
Dec. 20	Omicron becomes the dominant strain in the U.S.
Dec. 27	CDC cuts recommended isolation and quarantine periods for COVID-19 infections and exposures.
2022	
Jan. 4	USPS seeks temporary relief from OSHA's ETS, set to take effect on Jan. 10.
Jan. 13	Supreme Court strikes down ETS.
Jan. 18	In partnership with White House and other federal agencies, USPS begins taking, fulfilling, and delivering orders for COVID-19 test kits to U.S. households nationwide.
Feb. 22	USPS delivers more than 6 million COVID test kits — a single-day record.
Mar. 29	USPS mandatory face covering policy ends.
April 6	President Biden signs the <i>Postal Service Reform Act of 2022</i> into law, repealing the requirement that USPS annually prepay future retiree health benefits.
April 18	Optional 5-day-per-week telework policy for administrative employees ends.
May 20	USPS disbands its COVID-19 Response Command Team, transitioning ongoing pandemic response to Human Resources, Labor Relations, and the Law Department.

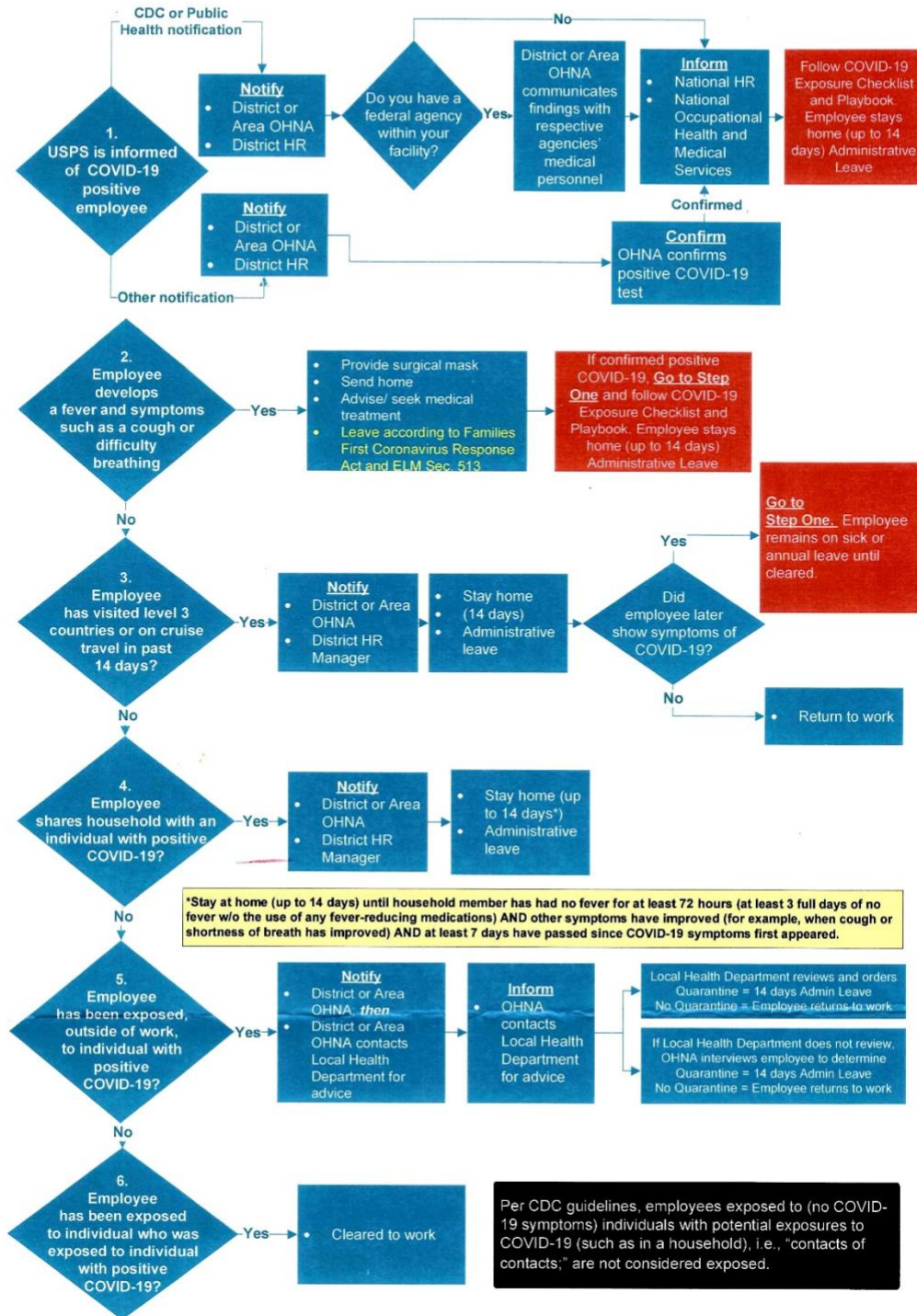
Appendix C: COVID-19 — Initial Decision Tree

COVID-19 – Initial Decision Tree

March 30, 2020

Employee information is protected by the Privacy and Rehabilitation Act and as such must be restricted to only those identified in this document.

For more information please contact Loretta Chamberlain at (202)748-2394 or call your Area OHNA and Area Human Resources Manager.



Appendix D: List of COVID-19 Stand-Up Talks

Note: In the list below, “POC-NOC” stands for Postal Operations Command/Network Operations Command; the “POC-NOC” email distribution list includes all operational units and all Post Offices. SUTs “not sent on POC-NOC” were sent by functional areas to targeted groups on a need-to-know basis.

SUT #	AUDIENCE & TOPIC	DATE
1	ALL EMPLOYEES: Staying healthy	01.24.2020
2	ALL EMPLOYEES: Health tips	02.11.2020
3	ALL EMPLOYEES: Staying vigilant	02.25.2020
4	ISC EMPLOYEES: COVID-19 (not sent on POC-NOC)	03.05.2020
5	ALL EMPLOYEES: PMG video update	03.09.2020
6	ALL EMPLOYEES: Resources available	03.11.2020
7	DELIVERY: Staying vigilant	03.16.2020
8	DELIVERY: Vehicle cleaning	03.17.2020
9	ALL EMPLOYEES: Social gathering guidance	03.18.2020
10	RETAIL: Prevention and response (not sent on POC-NOC)	03.19.2020
11	DELIVERY: Customer signature service	03.19.2020
12	DELIVERY: Response and prevention	03.23.2020
13	ALL EMPLOYEES: National mailing	03.21.2020
14	ALL EMPLOYEES: Operations continue	03.23.2020
15	RETAIL: Practicing social distancing	03.25.2020
16	ALL EMPLOYEES: EAP available	03.25.2020
17	MAIL PROCESSING: Interacting with HCR	03.28.2020
18	DELIVERY: Staying vigilant	03.26.2020
19	ALL EMPLOYEES: Employee privacy	03.31.2020
20	ALL EMPLOYEES: Essential Service Provider letter	03.27.2020
21	RETAIL: PO Box payment grace period	03.27.2020
22	DELIVERY & RETAIL OPERATIONS: Business closed---hold mail	03.28.2020
23	ALL EMPLOYEES: Families First Coronavirus Response Act	04.02.2020
24	DELIVERY: Food Drive postponement	04.01.2020
25	MAIL PROCESSING: Guidelines for handling PVS drivers	04.02.2020
26	RETAIL: Signatures for Payment Card Transactions (not sent on POC-NOC)	03.31.2020
27	DELIVERY: Carrier training social distancing	04.03.2020
28	ALL EMPLOYEES: Interacting with VMF personnel	04.03.2020
29	ALL EMPLOYEES: COVID-19 supplies — purchasing updates	04.03.2020
30	ALL EMPLOYEES: Handling the media (not sent on POC-NOC)	04.21.2020
31	RETAIL: Sneeze guards for window counters	04.04.2020
32	ALL EMPLOYEES: Additional CDC guidance	04.05.2020
33	DELIVERY & RETAIL: EIP mailings	04.23.2020
34	ALL EMPLOYEES: Face covering and mask update	04.21.2020
35	BMEU: Detached Mail Unit guidance	04.15.2020

36	RETAIL: Self-service kiosk social distancing	04.25.2020
37	ALL EMPLOYEES: Heat illness prevention	04.27.2020
38	ALL EMPLOYEES: Updates from CDC	05.01.2020
39	DELIVERY RETAIL MAIL PROCESSING: Business hold mail extended	04.30.2020
40	DELIVERY & RETAIL: Return to Sender extension (not sent on POC-NOC)	04.17.2020
41	RETAIL: PO Boxes payment grace period (not sent on POC-NOC)	04.30.2020
42	ALL EMPLOYEES: Contractor on-site procedures	05.06.2020
43	Message to reassigned employee(s) (Ops distributed, posted on COVID-19 site)	05.06.2020
44	ALL EMPLOYEES: Essential Services	06.01.2020
45	ALL EMPLOYEES: Proper use of Voyager card	07.02.2020
46	ALL EMPLOYEES: New face coverings and labels	07.10.2020
47	DELIVERY AND RETAIL: Hold Mail service	07.27.2020
48	DELIVERY: Customer Signature Service	08.04.2020
49	ALL EMPLOYEES: Face covering and mask reminder	08.20.2020
50	ALL EMPLOYEES: FFCRA leave	08.27.2020
51	DELIVERY AND RETAIL: Customer Signature Service	10.14.2020
52	DELIVERY: Keeping your vehicle clean	11.04.2020
53	ALL EMPLOYEES: Protecting everyone's safety and wellness	10.30.2020
54	ALL EMPLOYEES: Protecting everyone's safety and wellness	11.13.2020
55	ALL EMPLOYEES: Social Distancing	11.18.2020
56	ALL EMPLOYEES: COVID-19 Symptoms	11.27.2020
57	DELIVERY: Carrier pickup	11.30.2020
58	ALL EMPLOYEES: Essential services update	12.07.2020
59	ALL EMPLOYEES: Face coverings update	12.16.2020
60	ALL EMPLOYEES: Staying respectful	12.29.2020
61	ALL EMPLOYEES: COVID-19 vaccine availability	01.07.2021
62	ALL EMPLOYEES: COVID-19 vaccine availability update	01.20.2021
63	DELIVERY: Customer Signature Service	01.28.2021
64	ALL EMPLOYEES: COVID-19 vaccine eligibility	05.07.2021
65	ALL EMPLOYEES: Emergency federal employee leave	05.10.2021
66	ALL EMPLOYEES: Face covering and mask update	05.19.2021
67	ALL EMPLOYEES: Unemployment insurance fraud	05.27.2021
68	ALL EMPLOYEES: Face covering and mask update	07.27.2021
69	ALL EMPLOYEES: Face coverings policy reinstated	09.08.2021
70	ALL EMPLOYEES: Emergency federal employee leave ends September 30	10.01.2021
71	ALL EMPLOYEES: Temporary COVID-19 vaccination variance request	01.04.2022
72	ALL EMPLOYEES: Face covering policy reminder	02.07.2022
73	ALL EMPLOYEES: Face coverings update	03.31.2022
74	Customer Signature Capture Process	03.31.2022

Appendix E: Lists of Pandemic-Responsive MOUs *(to August 2022)*

American Postal Workers Union (Clerks, Maintenance, Motor Vehicle Service, and Nurses)

- APWU COVID MOU Extension Letter 03/22/2022
- COVID-19 MOUs Extended through February 11, 2022
- APWU COVID MOU Extension Letter 02/04/2022
- APWU COVID MOU Extension Letter 06/03/2021
- COVID-19 MOUs Extended through June 4, 2021
- Extension of MOU Temporary Step-3 and Arbitration Appeals – extension through Mar. 26, 2021
- MOU Temporary Additional Paid Leave for PSEs – extension through Mar. 26, 2021
- Liberal Changes of Schedules and Leave Extension – Sep. 28, 2020
- MOU extensions through Dec. 31 – effective Sep. 18, 2020
- Memorandum of Understanding – 02/03/2022
- Memorandum of Understanding – 09/03/2020
- Memorandum of Understanding – 05/21/2020
- Annual Leave Exchange for Leave Year 2021
- Annual Leave Carryover for Leave Year 2021
- Information Technology and Accounting Service AL Exchange Option for Leave Year 2021
- Information Technology and Accounting Service AL Carryover for Leave Year 2021
- National Postal Professional Nurses AL Exchange for Leave Year 2021
- National Postal Professional Nurses AL Carryover for Leave Year 2021
- MOU extensions through Sept. 25 — effective July 13, 2020
- Additional Extension on Timeline for Local Implementation
- Bulk Mail Tech and Mailing Requirement Clerk Position Qualification MOU
- Claims & Inquiries Clerks and Complaints & Inquiry Clerks Telework – 04/10/2020
- Customer Retention Sites Telework – 03/24/2020
- Exception for MOU re: Transfers – COVID-19 Related Absences – 04/22/2020
- Enterprise Customer Care Centers (CCCs) Telework – 03/19/2020
- Extension on Timeline for Local Implementation
- Human Resources Shared Service Center (HRSSC) Bargaining Unit Telework – 03/18/2020
- Information Technology and Accounting Services Bargaining Unit Telework
- Information Technology Service Desk Memorandum of Understanding – 04/01/2020
- Line H Work Hours and Liability — Custodians and Custodial Employees – 04/06/2020
- Mailing & Shipping Solutions Center (MSSC) Bargaining Unit Telework – 03/19/2020
- Maintenance Craft – Promotion Pending Qualification
- National Material Distribution Center (MDC) Bargaining Unit Telework
- Occupational Health Nurse Telework Memorandum of Understanding – 04/01/2020
- Temporary Additional Paid Leave for PSEs; Temporary Expanded SLDC during COVID-19 – 03/18/2020
- Temporary Exception Period – Clerk Craft Staffing Function 1 and Function 4 – 12/21/2020
- Temporary Exception Period – Clerk Craft Staffing Function 1 and Function 4 – 03/27/2020
- Temporary Exception for Level 18 Postmasters Performing Bargaining Unit Work – 03/24/2020
- Temporary Expanded SLDC During COVID-19 – National Postal Professional Nurses
- Temporary Extension on Article 19 Notifications Timelines – 03/31/2020
- Temporary Extension on Step 3 and Arbitration Appeals
- Temporary Extension on Step 3 and Arbitration Appeals - Extended
- Temporary Motor Vehicle Craft Staffing – COVID-19 – 04/09/2020
- Temporary Resources for COVID-19 Related Cleaning Requirements – 04/22/2020

Management Organizations

(NAPS = National Association of Postal Supervisors; UPMA = United Postmasters of America)

- NAPS Temporary Modification to Pay Provision for Exempt EAS Field Employees – 02/08/2022
- Response to NAPS Wagner – Additional Pay – 05/20/2020
- UPMA Temporary Modification to Pay Provisions for Exempt Postmasters – 02/08/2022
- Response to UPMA Special Exempt Status – 05/20/2020
- Extension Temp Pay Provision for Exempt EAS Field Employees Dec. 21, 2021
- COVID – Extension of Tulino 052020 Memorandum-Temporary Modification to Pay Provision for Exempt EAS Field Employees
- Liberal Changes of Schedules and Leave Extension – Sep. 28, 2020
- National Association of Postal Supervisors (NAPS) AL Carryover and Exchange for Leave Year 2020
- United Postmasters and Managers of America (UPMA) AL Carryover and Exchange for Leave Year 2020
- National Association of Postal Supervisors (NAPS) SLDC Notification Letter
- United Postmasters and Managers of America (UPMA) SLDC Notification Letter

National Association of Letter Carriers

- NALC COVID MOU Extension Letter – 03/24/2022
- MOU – Ext SB and Arb (5-6-2022) – 03/24/2022
- MOU – Signing OTDL ext. (5-6-2022) – 03/24/2022
- NALC COVID MOU Extension Letter – 02/04/2022
- NALC COVID MOU Extension Letter – 12/31/2021
- MOU Extensions – NALC – 02/03/2022
- MOU Extensions – NALC – 12/21/2021
- MOU Extensions – NALC – 09/30/2021
- MOU Signing OT lists extension – 02/03/2022
- MOU Signing OT lists extension – 12/20/2021
- MOU Signing OT lists extension – 09/30/2021
- MOU Extension on Step B and Arbitration time limits – 02/03/2022
- MOU Extension on Step B and Arbitration time limits – 12/20/2021
- MOU 7-01 time – 03/23/2020
- MOU Social Distancing – 03/30/2020
- MOU Suspension of CCA Leave – 03/19/2021
- MOU Temporary Carrier Assistants – 03/30/2020
- NALC MOU - Expanded SLDC – 03/18/2020
- MOU Temporary Time Limits – 09/30/2021
- Liberal Changes of Schedules and Leave – 09/30/2021
- Liberal Changes of Schedules and Leave – 03/23/2020
- MOU - Reinstatement of Temporary Additional Paid Leave for CCAs – 09/30/2021
- NALC COVID MOU Extension Letter – 06/03/2021
- COVID MOU Extension - NALC – 06/03/2021
- Temporary Time Limit Extension on Step B and Arbitration Appeals – extension through June 4, 2021
- Signing Overtime Lists–COVID-19 – extension through June 4, 2021
- COVID-19 MOUs Extended through June 4, 2021
- MOU Signing Overtime Lists–COVID-19 – extension through Mar. 26, 2021
- MOU Temporary Additional Paid Leave for CCAs – extension through Mar. 26, 2021
- Liberal Changes of Schedules and Leave Extension – Sep. 28, 2020
- MOU extensions through Dec. 31 — effective Sep. 18, 2020
- Signing Overtime Lists — COVID-19

- Temporary Time Limit Extension on Step B and Arbitration Appeals
- Temporary Workplace Changes to Promote Social Distancing — COVID-19
- Temporary Use of the ELM 432.53, City Letter Carriers (7:01 Rule)
- Temporary Additional Paid Leave for CCAs
- Memorandum of Understanding — Sept. 3, 2020
- Annual Leave Carryover for Leave Year 2021
- MOU extensions through Sept. 25 — effective July 13, 2020
- Memoranda of Understanding — May 19, 2020
- Exception to MOU re: Transfers – COVID-19 Related Absences
- Temporary Additional Paid Leave for City Carrier Assistants (CCAs); Temporary Expanded SLDC during COVID-19
- Temporary Time Limit Extension on Step B and Arbitration Appeals
- Temporary Time Limit Extension on Step B and Arbitration Appeals Extension
- Temporary Use of the Employee and Labor Relations Manual (ELM) 432.53, (7:01 Rule)
- Temporary Workplace Changes to Promote Social Distancing – COVID-19

National Association of Rural Letter Carriers

- MOU Extension NRLCA COVID – 03/22/2022
- MOU Extension NRLCA COVID – 02/02/2022
- MOU Extension NRLCA COVID – 12/21/2021
- MOU Extension NRLCA COVID – 09/30/2021
- MOU Extension NRLCA COVID – 06/03/2021
- NRLCA COVID MOUs – Officers Extension Memo – 02/04/2022
- NRLCA COVID MOUs – Officers Extension Memo – 12/31/2021
- NRLCA COVID MOUs – Officers Extension Memo – 06/03/2021
- Liberal Changes of Schedules and Leave - 9-30-2021
- Liberal Changes of Schedules and Leave - 3-23-2020
- NRLCA MOU - Temporary Expanded SLDC – 05/17/2020
- Social Distancing MOU NRLCA – 04/15/2020
- Temporary Additional Paid Leave for RCAs Suspension MOU
- Temporary Extension on Grievance and Arbitration Appeals – extension through June 4, 2021
- COVID-19 MOUs Extended through June 4, 2021
- MOU Temporary Extension on Grievance and Arbitration Appeals – extension through Mar. 26, 2021
- MOU Temporary Paid Leave for Rural Carrier Associates – 03/17/2021
- MOU extensions through 03/26/2021
- Liberal Changes of Schedules and Leave Extension – Sep. 28, 2020
- MOU extensions through Dec. 31 — effective Sep. 18, 2020
- Memorandum of Understanding — Sept. 3, 2020
- Annual Leave Carryover for Leave Year 2021
- MOU extensions through Sept. 25 — effective July 13, 2020
- Memoranda of Understanding — May 20, 2020
- Regular Carriers MOU
- Temporary Extension on Grievance and Arbitration Appeals
- Temporary Extension on Grievance and Arbitration Appeals – Extended
- Temporary Expanded SLDC during COVID-19; Temporary Paid Leave for Rural Carrier Associates (RCAs)
- Temporary Workplace Changes to Promote Social Distancing

National Postal Mail Handlers Union

- MOU Extension 03/25/2022 - NPMHU
- MOU Extension Step 3 and Arbitration Appeals 02/04/2022
- MOU Extension Step 3 and Arbitration Appeals 12/21/2021
- MOU Extension 02/04/2022 - NPMHU
- MOU Extension 12/21/2021 - NPMHU
- MOU Extension 06/03/2021 - NPMHU
- NPMHU COVID MOU Extension Letter – 02/04/2022
- NPMHU COVID MOU Extension Letter – 06/03/2021
- MOU - Temporary Exception Period COVID-19 – 03/19/2021
- MOU-MHA Leave 03-2021
- NPMHU Temporary Extended SLDC – 03/18/2020
- MOU Reappointment Opportunities for MHAs – 12/21/2021
- Temporary Extension on Step 3 and Arbitration Appeals – extension through June 4, 2021
- COVID-19 MOUs Extended through June 4, 2021
- MOU Temporary Extension on Step 3 and Arbitration Appeals – extension through Mar. 26, 2021
- MOU Temporary Additional Paid Leave for MHAs – extension through Mar. 26, 2021
- Liberal Changes of Schedules and Leave Extension – Sep. 28, 2020
- MOU extensions through Dec. 31 — effective Sep. 18, 2020
- Memorandum of Understanding — Sept. 3, 2020
- Annual Leave Exchange Option for Leave Year 2021
- MOU extensions through Sept. 25 — effective July 13, 2020
- Memoranda of Understanding — May 21, 2020
- Exception for MOU Transfers – COVID-19 Related Absences
- Extension of Local Implementation Procedures Timeline
- Temporary Additional Paid Leave for Mail Handler Assistants (MHAs); Temporary Expanded SLDC during COVID-19 – 03/18/2020
- Temporary Exception Period – COVID-19 – MHAs
- Temporary Extension on Step 3 and Arbitration Appeals
- Temporary Extension on Step 3 and Arbitration Appeals – Extended 30 Days
- Temporary Extension on Step 3 and Arbitration Appeals – Extended through June 17, 2020

Postal Police Officers Association

- Liberal Changes of Schedules and Leave Extension – Sep. 28, 2020
- Leave Carryover for Leave Year 2021
- Temporary Expanded SLDC during COVID-19

Appendix F: Essential Service Provider Letter

On March 27, 2020, Postal Service employees traveling for work in areas with local travel restrictions were instructed to carry this letter along with their USPS-issued ID badge, to provide travel justification in case they were stopped by state or local law enforcement.

DAVID E. WILLIAMS
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT



Essential Service Provider Letter

Law Enforcement Official: The bearer of this letter with an accompanying U.S. Postal Service identification badge provides essential services of the federal government.

The Postal Service is continuing to fulfill its critical public service mission by accepting and delivering mail and packages in accordance with federal law. The Postal Service's provision of mail and package delivery services is not affected by State and local government actions that are restricting commercial and personal activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the recent order or directive issued for the geographic areas under your jurisdiction.

This exemption includes the employees' and contractors' time traveling to and from their workplaces.

We are working closely with federal, state, and local health authorities to ensure that our continued operations during this time of national emergency are conducted in a manner that protects the safety of our employees and the public.

Confirmation of this individual's status as a Postal Service employee or contractor may be received by contacting the employee's supervisor at

_____.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "D. Williams", with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

David E. Williams

475 L'ENFANT PLAZA SW
WASHINGTON DC 20260-0061
WWW.USPS.COM