



# NATIONAL POSTAL MAIL HANDLERS UNION

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## 2011 Contract Update #4

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Bargaining over the terms of the 2011 National Agreement is continuing, with many proposals being exchanged and frequent meetings being held.

During the past few weeks, several themes have emerged. First, the Postal Service has tried to drive most discussions toward ongoing efforts to minimize its costs and to maximize its flexibility in all aspects of postal operations and administration. At bottom, the decline in first-class mail volume is the starting point for all management proposals. Meanwhile, given that the Postal Service recently proposed to study possible closings or consolidations at more than 250 mail processing facilities, the NPMHU is focusing on protecting jobs and minimizing disruptions to the careers of current bargaining unit members.

As noted, the USPS bargaining team has repeatedly made it clear that its highest priority is to cut costs and increase efficiency. To this point, however, management has offered relatively few concrete ideas as to how the agency would like to achieve these goals. One notable exception concerns grievance handling and arbitration, as the Postal Service is targeting Article 15 of the National Agreement and the costs that it generates. In particular, USPS management has proposed several changes which it claims would reduce the number of “unjustified” grievances and “unnecessary” arbitrations.

The NPMHU has responded to these proposals. We start with the proposition that the easiest way to reduce the costs of grievances and arbitrations is for postal management to stop violating the contract on such a routine basis. As you might expect, this response sometimes leads to heated exchanges, although with most of the bargaining taking place in off-the-record subcommittee meetings, it also is possible to have cooler discussions about deficiencies that actually may exist in the current grievance and arbitration procedure. Only time will tell whether it is possible to correct some or all of these problems with new contract language.

Of more importance to the Union – indeed, of critical importance to all mail handlers – is how potential facility closings or consolidations, if

they were to occur, could affect the everyday lives of mail handlers around the country. This concern is reflected in many of the Union’s proposals, as well as many of the questions, answers, and priorities that the NPMHU has put forth at the bargaining table. Through this process, it has become clear that the Postal Service must address some fundamental questions before it can deal with the impact of massive changes to the mail processing network.

A related focus for the NPMHU has been on issues relating to seniority and excessing – also especially relevant because of the potential closing and consolidation of facilities. Any reduction in postal plants could result in the reshuffling of thousands of mail handlers to and from various postal installations, and therefore the Union needs to make certain that such movements, if necessary, are implemented in a fair and equitable manner.

The Union also is attempting to secure current and future jobs in the mail handler craft by reducing the Postal Service’s capacity to engage in the unfettered subcontracting of mail handler work to the private-sector. The NPMHU believes that the Postal Service miscalculates its potential savings in this area, and that these miscalculations fuel an unjustified preference for subcontracting. Moreover, the USPS also is ignoring the adverse impact that such contracting out has on employee morale, on postal operations, and on a host of other subjects. The NPMHU is seeking to reduce, if not eliminate, USPS subcontracting of mail handler work, both retroactively and prospectively.

Now that the parties have exchanged many proposals at the main bargaining table, both sides will spend the coming days and weeks discussing these proposals amongst themselves and with representatives of the other party. The NPMHU will continue to explore all proposals in order to identify ways to incorporate language into the National Agreement that will benefit the entire mail handler craft.

Next week, the Postal Service will be making a formal presentation on its current financial condition. Keep an eye on your bulletin board for the latest information.

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