



solidations continue to occur. The Union at all levels must continue to address each particular closing or consolidation, or each proposed closing or consolidation, using a combination of contractual and political responses. For the former, issues under Article 12 must be raised, to minimize to the greatest extent possible any dislocation or inconvenience to mail handlers. On the legislative front, NPMHU representatives are coordinating with other postal unions and community groups that may be working either to oppose or to mitigate the effects of a proposed closing or consolidation. Together, these contractual and political efforts have proved useful, at least in some places, to defeat or limit or delay a closing or consolidation, and in other places to reduce any adverse impact on mail handlers.

(c) Conversion of Bulk Mail Centers into Network Distribution Centers.

Mail handlers in attendance at the 2008 Convention will remember that a crucial issue at that time was the potential subcontracting out of mail handler work from the Bulk Mail Centers. A resolution was unanimously passed to create a Task Force to address the issues and combat the ill-advised plans, and representatives from each BMC were selected to join forces with the National Union in a nationwide effort to protect the BMCs. Fortunately, the hard work paid off, and the Postal Service decided to maintain the BMC network, slightly revised, as an in-house USPS network, now called Network Distribution Centers.

Subcontracting. The past four years have seen a continuation of the Postal Service's efforts to subcontract or outsource Mail Handler work under Article 32. Most troubling has been the project aimed at bedloading trucks for cross-country trips by using low-paid private contractors instead of mail handlers, with claims that the Postal Service has neither the money nor the equipment to perform the work with career postal employees.

It makes absolutely no sense to the NPMHU for the Postal Service to give away mail volume to the private sector, when nearby postal plants are suffering from a major loss of mail volume themselves. If the Postal Service decides that bedloading of trucks makes the transportation of mail more efficient and less costly, then it would make perfect business sense to relocate that work to the nearby plants to be performed by Mail Handlers.

There simply is no need to outsource this work. We have challenged this ill-advised plan, and will fight to get this work back where it rightfully belongs, in the Mail Handler craft.

Safety and Health in the Workplace:

During the past four years, the National Union has continued its efforts to protect the on-the-job safety and health of all Mail Handlers. From a historical perspective, two key events have dramatically changed the landscape in this area. First, in 1998, Congress enacted the Postal Employees Safety Enhancement Act, which applied private-sector rules under the Occupational Safety and Health Act to Mail Handlers and other postal employees. And second, beginning in 2001, the Postal Service and its employees fell victim to a series of bio-terrorist attacks, starting with anthrax in October 2001, and continuing with the mailing of ricin and other harmful agents since that time. Both of these developments have significantly changed the postal landscape.

Bio-Terrorism and the Mail Security Task Force.

As always, a paramount concern of the NPMHU is the safety and well-being of all Mail Handlers and other postal employees. To this end, the National Union has been an active participant in the Mail Security Task Force (renamed the Homeland Security Advisory Group)—which includes representatives of postal management, as well as all unions and employee associations. This group has been meeting on a routine basis to ensure that all reasonable measures are being taken to prevent any further infection from anthrax, ricin, or other biological agents. With union support, the Postal Service was able to obtain funding for the installation of new bio-detection technology, and more recently, the focus of the Group has turned to planning for an outbreak of pandemic flu and similar natural disasters. Only by planning in advance can the safety and security of all Mail Handlers be maximized.

Ergonomic Risk Reduction Process and Voluntary Protection Program.

Almost ten years ago, the National Union signed a historic agreement with the Postal Service and representatives of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration aimed at reducing musculoskeletal risk factors in the postal workplace. The partners agreed to work cooperatively to implement an Ergonomic Risk Reduction Process to identify musculoskeletal disorders and control the associated risk factors. After implementation of the program for five years, the results were

terrific. The program was launched at more than 160 postal facilities, and in those facilities in which studies were conducted, there was a substantial reduction in reportable injuries. Given this success, the Union had hoped that ERRP would be expanded into every postal facility so that the protection offered by this process could be afforded to all Mail Handlers.

The National Union also partnered with the Postal Service and with OSHA to implement the prestigious Voluntary Protection Programs, a long-standing program with a proven record of reducing injuries and illnesses. Data showed that sites utilizing the VPP had a 13% reduction in recordable injury and illness incidents, resulting in 60% fewer injuries and illnesses than the industry average.

Unfortunately, the financial crisis facing the Postal Service has caused unjustified cuts in these safety and health programs. For the USPS to be penny-wise and pound-foolish when it comes to safety is unacceptable to the NPMHU; thus, the National Union is seeking to resurrect the joint efforts, as the well-being of Mail Handlers cannot take a back seat to financial concerns.

Quality of Work Life: The QWL or Quality of Work Life process continues to succeed, for those Local Unions that choose to participate. There have been several meetings and training programs to highlight the QWL process, which seeks to develop good working relationships between labor and management. To foster this program, the National Union remains an active participant on the National Joint Steering Committee, and hundreds of Mail Handlers from around the country are still participating in QWL. Unfortunately, in many areas—again in an ill-advised attempt to save money—the Postal Service has cut back on QWL. At a recent National Joint Steering Committee meeting, we made it clear to our counterparts on the NJSC that this was counterproductive, and that QWL should be encouraged in the field. We are hoping to have a “National Commitment letter” sent out to the field shortly. We also have discussed having a National QWL Conference in the not-too-distant future.

Lead Clerks: In a recent development, reports from the field have indicated that the newly designated “lead clerks” in the APWU craft are being assigned to “lead” mail handlers. We have exchanged correspondence with Postal Headquarters expressing our objections to being supervised, directed, or guided by clerical