

SAFETY & HEALTH: COME OUT, COME OUT, WHEREVER YOU ARE!

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Sisters and Brothers, there are a number of important aspects of the work we perform day in and day out as employees of the United States Postal Service. However, for the thousands of representatives of this great Union, it can be argued that the most important facet of our representation of the mail handler craft might very well be keeping our fellow sisters and brothers free from job related illness or injury. Making sure that mail handlers leave the building in the very same condition they entered it is paramount. Life in a heavily mechanized environment is quite rightly no walk in the park and there are far too many examples where those who are responsible for ensuring the safety of all in the workplace do not meet the minimum standard. There seems to be a growing disrespect and at times an almost complete disregard for the safety and health of those who actually move the nation's mail. I grant you that there may be those on the employer's side of this equation who understand their responsibility, but they are few and far between.

For the scores of Mail Handler Representatives across all thirty-six Local Unions as well as our national representatives who enforce the contractual requirements of Article 14 of our contract and the dozens and dozens of postal handbooks, manuals, and publications regarding safety procedures and protocols, we thank you. You all recognize the great importance of protecting life and limb and we urge you to keep up the stellar work. Our "partners" in this endeavor to keep the safety and health of all employees as the highest priority, on the other hand, are not always as committed as we are. The opening paragraph of Article 14 of our National Agreement reads;

It is the responsibility of management to provide safe working conditions in all present and future installations and to develop a safe working force. The Union will cooperate with and assist management to live up to this responsibility. The Employer

agrees to give appropriate consideration to human factors in the design and development of automated systems. (underlining added)

The Union's part in this cooperative effort is to "assist management to live up to..." creating a safe place to work. There is ample evidence that we meet our part of the bargain in a multitude of ways, including identifying unsafe conditions and practices through the submission of PS Forms 1767, *Report of Hazard, Unsafe Condition, or Practice*. This is one of many roles we play in this contractual partnership with the employer. For those who have had the boldness to identify an unsafe condition or hazard in the workplace and then expand their audacity by submitting a PS Form 1767, know all too well the typical response of those we are "assisting". After decades of representation, I have yet to hear tale of a thank you from the management recipient of the 1767. The management response when we submit a 1767 is generally "What have I ever done to deserve this?" as though it were a disciplinary notice we just handed them. The point of the exercise is completely lost on the victimized manager. I am sure you wouldn't be able to guess the purpose of the 1767 from the reaction of a vast majority of the managers who actually accept that 1767. Yes, I am aware that there are those in management who won't even accept a PS Form 1767. The Employee and Labor Relations Manual states the purpose of the 1767 as,

PS Form 1767 is designed to encourage employee participation in the Postal Service safety and health program and to provide prompt action when employees report a hazard. This form provides a channel of communication between employees and management that promotes a prompt analysis and response with corrective action to reports of alleged hazards, unsafe conditions, or unsafe practices.



Here are the rules for the employer's agents when receiving the 1767. (ELM 824.632)

The immediate supervisor must promptly (within the tour of duty):

- a. Investigate the alleged condition.**
- b. Initiate immediate corrective action or make appropriate recommendations.**
- c. Record actions or recommendations on PS Form 1767.**
- d. Forward the original PS Form 1767 and one copy to the next appropriate level of management (approving official).**
- e. Give the employee a copy signed by the supervisor as a receipt.**
- f. Immediately forward the third copy to the facility safety coordinator. It is the supervisor's responsibility to monitor the status of the report at all times until the hazard is abated. If the hazard remains unabated longer than 7 calendar days, the supervisor must verbally inform the employee as to abatement status at the end of each 7-day interval.**

By the way, the Employee and Labor Relations Manual Chapter 8, Section 824.631 adds,

Discrimination against an employee for reporting a safety and health hazard is unlawful.

Yes, unlawful!

This is just a snippet of the unmet requirements of our continuing quest to make our workplace safe. As mentioned, there are scores of handbooks, manuals, and publications that require the employer to do a lot more than they are doing today. For example, the Supervisor's Safety Handbook, the EL-801, (yea, there is one of those) requires, among many other things, the development of a Job Safety Analysis or PS Form 1783. The EL-801 reads in part

Doing a job the safe way is the same as doing a job the right way. Develop and teach safe procedures for each job. A useful way to review job methods and uncover hazards is to perform a job safety analysis (JSA) using PS Form 1783, On-the-Job Safety Review/Analysis (see Exhibit 8-14.1). Keep a complete and updated JSA for each job task in your work area.

It gets better when the EL-801 also instructs the supervisor,

When you distribute a completed JSA, it is your responsibility to explain its contents to your employees. If necessary, give your employees further training so they know exactly how to do the job — without accidents. Train new employees in basic job steps; a well-prepared JSA makes an effective guide for training.

Occasionally observe your employees as they perform jobs for which a JSA has been developed. The JSA allows you to determine whether or not they are doing their job safely.

Can anyone actually remember the last time a supervisor distributed a completed Job Safety Analysis (JSA) and provided safety instruction to a new employee working in an operation for the first time? Operations management has lost sight of its responsibility to promote a safe workplace and like many other aspects of employee-employer relationship the employer's representatives now regularly demonstrate a lack of respect for the most important aspect of the United States Postal Service, its employees. The time has long since passed for us to collectively stand up and demand more from those who claim to know better. We urge you all to engage in the process of making our work safer and hold those responsible, accountable.

In Solidarity
John Gibson