

# NAVIGATING THE OWCP AND ECOMP SYSTEM

## From the past to the future:

JOHN (JR) MACON, SOUTHERN REGION VICE PRESIDENT,  
LOCAL 329 PRESIDENT



**H**ow have times changed since the 1970s, from me working in Chicago, IL at an Ace Hardware earning \$1.80 an hour, then taking the written exam in person and being informed by letter (which is now a rarity) that I was hired to work at Chicago's Main Post Office as a (PTF) Mail Handler making 3 bucks and 96 cents an hour. **Fast forward:** with raises over the years, a new MHA now earns \$19.02 per hour at Level 4.

At that time, communication by email did not exist, not becoming available to the public until the late 1980s and early 1990s. Mailgram, telegrams, payphones were in vogue. Cellphones were not commercially available until 1983. **Wow!**

After exiting the subway to attend orientation at Chicago's Main Post Office, I gazed at this 'one big beautiful' 13 story stone structure, sitting along the Chicago River. So expansive that train tracks carrying loaded rail cars full of mail were unloaded daily. Deep in it's under belly with vehicular traffic from the Eisenhower Expressway also buzzing through it... into the Congress Parkway. This sorting and processing center also employed more than 23,000 employees and contained a full cafeteria, a bank, a first aid center and a library.

During orientation, I was one of more than 100 new Handlers; lifting 70 to 100 pound canvas sacks, taking an oath of office and signing up as a dues paying member. One of the most important instructions we received during orientation: "work safely and if you sustain an on-the-job injury, report it immediately to your supervisor."

When I hit the workroom floor as a rambunctious 18-year-old, I did not understand what working safely meant. I was just happy to make a decent wage. Unbeknown to me the Occupational Safety and Health Act had just been signed by President Richard Nixon in 1970 making the USPS subject to OSHA standards in April 1971, but unsafe working conditions still existed. In 1998: the Postal Employees Safety Enhancement

Act finally made the USPS subject to the OSH Act of 1970. A long time coming!

Safety talks and training were initially non-existent. We were unloading and loading trucks by pulling containers instead of pushing, lifting, and bending improperly, and never stretching to loosen up.

There were no seat belts or overhead bars on forklifts, which led to injuries and deaths. One important tidbit I remembered from orientation, "immediately report your injuries to your supervisor."

My first accident involved me pulling an OTR up my heel and ankle. My supervisor was immediately informed. I was transported by Postal vehicle to the government medical center. My supervisor interviewed me and filled out the CA-1 for traumatic injury. Prompt notification and medical documentation allowed me to receive COP.

I believe this practice of always immediately reporting my injuries and unsafe working conditions resulted in all my injury claims being approved by (OWCP) Office of Workers' Compensation Programs, which assisted in decreasing unsafe working conditions for me and my co-workers.

### ECOMP (EMPLOYEES' COMPENSATION OPERATIONS & MANAGEMENT PORTAL)

Since the spring of 2020 after the USPS piloted test programs, which allow employees to file claims electronically, the USPS have expanded ECOMP claim filing to all employees. After September of 2020, OWCP expected all claims to be filed via the ECOMP web portal. On occasion, based on the circumstances, paper claim forms from injured workers may be accepted but filing through ECOMP at <https://www.ecomp.dol.gov/> is recommended.

When an employee sustains an on-the-job injury, even if it seems minor, they should immediately report the injury

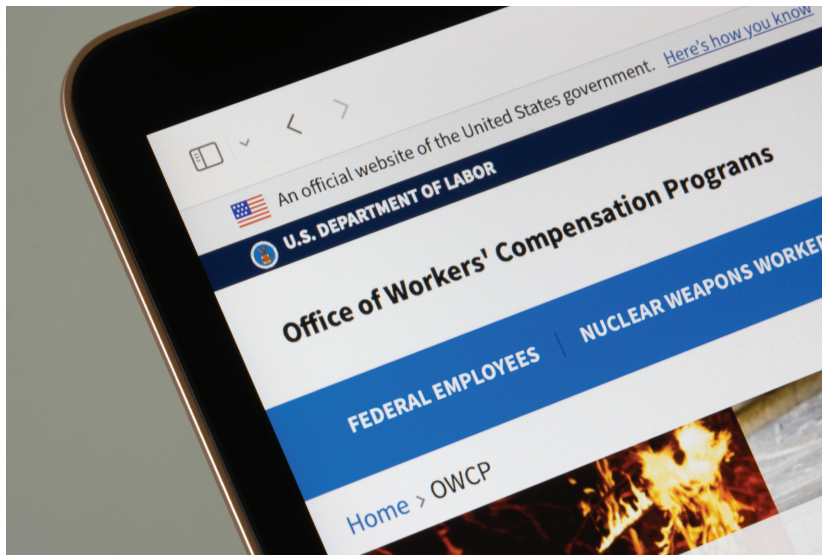
to their immediate supervisor or someone acting in place of their supervisor (See EL-814). Promptly reporting an injury is essential to establishing a work-related injury claim and avoiding potential delays or jeopardizing the claim.

FECA requires that notice of injury should be given by the employee or person acting on their behalf within 3 years of the onset of the injury or condition. It is recommended to give notice immediately after a traumatic injury occurs. Failure to give notice on Form CA-1 (through ECOMP) within 30 calendar days from the date of injury will result in a loss of entitlement to COP and may result in a loss of compensation rights if not filed within 3 years

The employee should also notify their union steward when injured to assist in navigating the claim process.

### **SUPERVISOR'S RESPONSIBILITIES:**

- Upon notice of traumatic injury, the supervisor is responsible for ensuring that appropriate medical care is provided.
- Discuss the facts of the injury.
- Provide the employee with ECOMP pamphlet.
- Assist the employee in filing their injury claim through ECOMP, registering within 24-48 hours at <https://www.ecomp.dol.gov>
- For medical treatment for a traumatic injury, the supervisor should complete the front of the Form CA-16 for authorization of medical care within 4 hours.
- Advise that the Form CA-1 for traumatic injury or Form CA-2 for Occupational Disease is to be completed on ECOMP.
- Advise they are responsible for electronically uploading all compensation forms and medical evidence of a disabling injury within 10 days after filing Form CA-1.
- They must advise the employee to elect Continuation Of Pay (COP) for up to 45 calendar days when filling out Form CA-1.
- Advise the employee they have a three-day waiting period before COP will be granted. Other leave may be used during this initial 3-day period.



**Emergency Treatment:** if the injury is an emergency, the employee should be sent to the nearest available hospital. The supervisor may accompany the employee to facilitate prompt medical treatment (ELM 545.4).

A medical emergency is an injury or sudden and unexpected onset of a condition requiring immediate medical care. Some injuries are considered emergencies if not treated promptly they might become more serious, such as animal bites, eye injuries, deep cuts, broken bones, etc.

The manager or the supervisor must report all injuries and illnesses within 24 hours of the date of accident, the diagnosis of injury or illness, or the notification of the manager of the situation (EL-821.12).

### **THERE ARE THREE TYPES OF INJURIES UNDER ELM 540:**

**Traumatic Injury (Form CA-1):** a condition of the body caused by external force, including a wound, stress, or

strain. It must be identifiable as to time and place of occurrence and include damage to medical braces, artificial limbs, and other prosthetic devices. The injury also must be caused by a specific event or incident or a series of incidents or events within a workday.

**Occupational Disease or Illness (Form CA-2):** an illness or disease produced by systemic infections; continued or repeated stress or strain by lifting, keying, walking or manually operating equipment; exposure to toxins, dust, fumes, poisons, etc. or other repeated exposures to conditions of the work environment over a longer period of time than a workday.

**Recurrence of disability and Recurrence of medical condition (Form CA-2A).** Notice of recurrence should be promptly submitted to OWCP if it causes the employee to lose time from work and incur a wage loss or if the employee experiences a renewed need for treatment after previously being released from medical care.

**Injury Policies should be posted on Bulletin Boards.**