

LEAVE, PER YOUR REQUEST

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Over the years the Postal Service has expanded the ways in which Mail Handlers can request leave. Much of the expansion includes but is not limited to automated leave requests via eLRA, IVR, and computer-generated PS Form 3971 — Request for or Notification of Absence (leave slip). These advances have outpaced the governing handbooks, manuals, and most local memoranda of understanding (LMOU). Though these expansions complement the existing local leave policies and practices, the LMOU is still binding on the local parties.

This article is compressed, but it will briefly explain some methods for submitting leave requests, the possible pitfalls of the automated processes, and the finer details of the leave slip. In truth, having multiple methods and options for submitting leave requests is convenient because the leave requested isn't automatically disapproved for **"Needs of the Service."** Mail Handlers need to be cautious when submitting leave requests by any method, because ultimately the leave must be approved.

ELM 511.23 makes clear, "employees are responsible for making request for leave by completing PS Form 3971 and to obtain approval before taking leave — except in cases of emergencies." When the employee exercises an alternative method to request leave, upon returning to work he/she is responsible for completing a leave slip, enter the confirmation number in the "Remarks" block, and submit the leave slip to his immediate supervisor. The employee should also request a copy of the leave slip when the supervisor signs and dates the "Notified" block of the leave slip for his/her records.

When an employee fails to submit a leave slip for leave requested and taken via the automated methods, management will generally print a computer-generated PS Form 3971 for the employee, with the leave type, hours, and comment sections, already filled in. Employees must exercise caution when presented with these management-generated leave slips. Prior to signing a computer-generated leave slip, closely examine the entries to ensure they are exactly what you requested. If not, in the "remarks" write, **"the entries on**

this form are inaccurate and not reflective of the leave I requested" then sign and date the form. Do not simply initial the Avoid the Refuse to Sign (RTS) on the leave slips, as doing so simply indicates that the employee, when presented with this receipt, refused to sign but does not indicate that the employee disagrees with the facts listed.

If management disapproves your request for leave that you've taken, the reason must be noted in the appropriate section, and what alternative leave type was offered for the time taken in lieu of the denied leave (generating a 2nd leave slip).

Most important on the front of the PS Form 3971, is the Official Action on Application (Return copy of signed request to employee) block. The "Continued on Reverse" is rarely, if ever, checked by management. The two (2) pages/sides of the 3971 was created to do four (4) things:

1. to cover every type of "leave request" within the USPS
2. to document whether the supervisor required the employee to provide the reason he/she **was** incapacitated and/or **was/will** be unavailable for duty during this absence
3. to document whether the supervisor required the employee's FMLA eligibility
4. to document *whether the Postal Service determined additional documentation to substantiate an absence was required.*

The second page is dedicated to eliminating common confusion between the parties:

EXAMPLE GIVEN:

Supervisor — *"I told the employee to bring in documentation to substantiate his absences."*

Union — *"Where is it documented?"*

Always retain copies of all 3971s as well as your leave balances. Should you have a dispute regarding your leave request, or if management attempts to discipline you for attendance-related issues, request to see your Shop Steward.