

## MAIL HANDLER ASSISTANTS

**T**he Fishgold Arbitration Award was issued on February 15, 2013, and for the first time in NPMHU history that award created a new category of non-career mail handler employees called Mail Handler Assistants or MHAs. This new category now serves as the entry point for all future career mail handlers to be hired by the Postal Service.

As an MHA, or a former MHA, it is important that you know a little about the history of the NPMHU. The National Postal Mail Handlers Union was formed in 1905 as “The National Association of Post Office Rail Way Mail Laborers.” The term association was generally used during this era because unions did not gain lawful recognition in the federal government, which then served as the employer of all postal employees, until the early 1960s. In 1944, the term “Mail Laborer” was changed by an Act of Congress to “Mail Handler,” in part because legislation required that postal employees be provided designations such as crafts, categories, etc. In 1963, the Mail Handlers Union established its own Health Benefits Plan that still exists until this day.

In 1970, with enactment of the Postal Reorganization Act and the creation of the U.S. Postal Service as an independent establishment of the executive branch of the federal government, the major postal unions gained exclusive bargaining rights for their members. A few years later, in the mid-1970s, the Mail Handlers Union instituted an amalgamation process that resulted in our current structure, consisting of 37 Local Unions representing mail handlers in all fifty states as well as Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia.

At present time there are over 44,000 mail handlers in the Postal Service, including 5,500 MHAs on the rolls of the Postal Service. As noted earlier, the only outside source for future career hiring within the mail handler craft is from the ranks of the MHAs. The MHA workforce is comprised of non-career, mail handler bargaining unit employees who are hired from an appropriate register. MHAs are hired for a 360 calendar-day appointment. MHAs must

have a break in service of five days if they are to be reappointed. MHAs who are scheduled to work and report in 200 or more man year offices are guaranteed four hours of work or pay. Those MHAs who work in smaller installations are guaranteed two hours of work or pay. Wages or rates of pay for MHAs are determined by the National Agreement and increase each year. MHAs also earn night-shift differential, annual leave, and have their relative standing determined by initial date of hire. MHAs are assigned EINs and PINs, have access to LiteBlue, and have access to most aspects of the grievance and arbitration procedure.

MHAs are converted to full-time career status based on their relative standing in the installation in which they were hired. Upon conversion to career status, MHAs begin a new period of seniority. The time an MHA works prior to conversion does not count towards career service or seniority. An MHA has the right not to accept a career appointment and that non-acceptance does not change his or her standing on the relative standing list for future conversions. MHAs are paid overtime in accordance with the Fair Labor Standards Act, the Employee and Labor Relations Manual and the Fishgold Arbitration Award. MHAs cannot be required to work more than 12 hours per day, including overtime and meal time in a service day. MHAs earn annual leave based on the number of hours they work (one hour for each 20 hours of work in each pay period). MHAs also are entitled to FMLA protection.

MHAs are entitled to payment of continuation of pay (COP) and payment of compensation if injured on the job. COP for MHA employees should be calculated in accordance with 20 C.F.R. §10.216(b)(2). MHAs can serve as Union Stewards and the NPMHU is entitled to address all newly hired MHAs as part of the hiring process.

The National Office of the NPMHU as well as your Local Union have been working vigorously to improve the working conditions, rights, and benefits for all employees, especially those who are MHAs. Since the Fishgold Award, these are



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some of the things that the NPMHU has been able to accomplish for our MHAs:

- On August 7, 2013, the NPMHU finalized its Questions and Answers providing guidance for the 2013 Fishgold Arbitration Award.
- On September 26, 2013, the NPMHU settled a National-level dispute concerning the Postal Service's calculation of overtime for MHAs.
- On September 22, 2014, the NPMHU signed a MOU concerning the Relative Standing of MHAs and their Subsequent Seniority Upon Conversion.
- On March 16, 2015, the NPMHU entered into a settlement with the USPS to settle MHA cap grievances that resulted in the conversion of a number of MHAs to full-time career positions.
- On August 17, 2015, the NPMHU entered into a Memorandum of Understanding providing for a specific pecking order when filling residual vacancies, to include the conversion of MHAs. Since then, several thousand MHAs have been converted to career status.

On February 8, 2016, the NPMHU reached a Step 4 settlement on the important issue of the meaning of “just cause” when the Postal Service imposes discipline on MHAs.

Our work is not done, however. The NPMHU continues, most notably during the ongoing or latest round of bargaining with the Postal Service, to seek improvements in the working conditions of MHAs.

To all MHAs, thank you for your commitment and welcome to the NPMHU.

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