



National Postal Mail Handlers Union

Paul V. Hogrogian
National President

Michael J. Hora
National Secretary-Treasurer

June Harris
Vice President
Central Region

John A. Gibson
Vice President
Eastern Region

David E. Wilkin
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Lawrence B. Sapp
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Southern Region

Don J. Sneesby
Vice President
Western Region

Message from President Paul Hogrogian

April 9, 2020

Brothers and Sisters,

Mail Handlers and postal workers from around the country continue to courageously perform essential federal service under the extraordinary circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The American public, especially rural America, has come to depend on the Post Office and Mail Handlers for delivery of prescription drugs, social security and pension checks, election ballots, e-commerce and other items of critical importance. All postal workers have stepped up and provided the needed services. However, Mail Handlers deserve to be provided with the protections that they need in order to do their jobs as safely as possible.

When I last reported to you regarding the coronavirus (COVID-19) on April 2, 2020, there were 269 postal workers who were confirmed to be COVID-19 positive and 241 employees presumed to be positive for a total of 510 infected employees. The latest numbers (as of April 8, 2020) show 436 postal workers who have tested positive and 400 employees who have been presumed to be positive for a total of 836 infected employees. That number will certainly continue to rise as projections are that the impact of the coronavirus is not expected to peak until the next few weeks.

NPMHU representatives continue to meet on a regular basis with their counterparts in postal management to discuss the Postal Service's response to the outbreak of the virus and to ensure that the proper protocols are in place during ever-changing circumstances. NPMHU representatives insist that all Mail Handlers be provided with the personal protective equipment that they need and well as ensuring that the proper protocols are in place to minimize their exposure to the COVID-19 virus. Postal management has stated that they will continue to follow the guidance of the "health experts" such as CDC and HHS. The Postal Service has put the following protocol in place regarding the pandemic:

1. Employees returning from all international travel or returning from all cruise ships will be told to self-quarantine for 14 days and will be paid Emergency Sick Leave under the Families First Coronavirus Recovery Act (FFCRA).
2. Employees determined by the USPS and Public Health to have been in close contact (defined as 6 feet or closer for 10 minutes or more) with another employee who has tested as COVID-19 positive and is symptomatic will be told to self-quarantine for 14 days and will be paid Emergency Sick Leave.



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***There have been numerous reports from the field that this is not being complied with in all postal facilities. There appears to be a gap between the time an employee has been identified as COVID-19 positive and the time contact tracing (determining who has been in close contact with an infected employee) is conducted. There are often delays of 3 days or more. This is not acceptable. The longer it takes to identify employees who have been exposed to the virus, the greater the chance that many other employees may become infected. Senior Postal Management has assured the NPMHU that additional personnel in the form of additional Occupational Health Nurses and Compensation Specialists will be assigned to conduct expedited contact tracing. Please report any violation of this protocol to your Union representative.

- Those employees found to be COVID-19 positive will require medical clearance in order to return to work.
- Buildings are to be cleaned on a regular basis. (We have been receiving reports that this is not being complied with in all installations. The Postal Service has committed to ramping up its efforts to clean “frequently touched surfaces.” Please contact your union representative to report facilities that are not in compliance.) Buildings where employees have been confirmed to be COVID-19 positive will undergo a thorough “deep cleaning.”
- Stand up talks should be given on a regular, if not daily, basis. (We have received numerous reports that this is not being done. These talks should be given orally before small groups of 10 or less. The Postmaster General has assured us that instructions will be given that ALL facilities must provide these talks regularly.)
- Supplies (Gloves/Masks/Hand Sanitizers/Wipes) are to be made available. We have been assured that these supplies will continue to be replenished as needed. Senior Postal Management has reported to the NPMHU that sufficient personal protective equipment is available:

Hand Sanitizers: 144,000 bottles were delivered to postal facilities
67,000 bottles is stock in the Topeka Warehouse
200,000 bottles on hand in the field
1.8 Million bottles on order

Gloves: 5.1 Million shipped to postal facilities
3.8 Million in stock
23.7 Million on hand in the field
3.7 Million on order



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Masks 18.8 Million shipped to postal facilities
 1.5 Million is stock
 4.5 Million on hand in the field
 21.1 Million on order

As you can see there is a sufficient amount protective equipment available. However, there are always gaps in the supply chain. Please contact your Union representatives if your facility still does not have adequate supplies of these items.

These protocols are amended as circumstances change.

Regular Stand Up Talks should include various topics involving COVID-19 including:

1. Avoid close contact with people who are sick
2. Avoid touching eyes, nose, mouth with unwashed hands
3. **Stay home when you are sick**
Please be responsible and do not put your co-workers at any further risk than they already are.
4. **Please immediately report to your supervisor if you experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19 immediately. This will allow the necessary contact tracing to be conducted as soon as possible. This will help in limiting the spread of the virus.**
5. Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues, then throw tissue in trash
6. Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces
7. Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
8. Use a 60-percent alcohol-based hand sanitizer
9. Practice social distancing while at work and at your work station. Work stations should be modified to ensure that employees are working no closer than 6 feet from their co-workers.
10. **All employees are strongly encouraged to wear masks or other face coverings while on duty. This is a new CDC recommendation. It is not necessarily for the protection of the**



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employees wearing the masks but rather for the protection of all of their co-workers. We have been assured by senior postal management that sufficient supplies of masks are and will continue to be available. Employees also may use their own personal cloth face coverings.

Our Regional Directors are in constant contact with their counterparts in the Postal Area Offices to discuss COVID-19 issues. If you are aware of any violations of the protocols listed above, please bring them to the attention of your local union representatives so that they may refer them to the Regional Directors. Our Regional Directors have been extremely successful in rectifying problems brought to their attention. However, they cannot correct a problem of which they are not aware.

A liberal leave policy remains in effect with regard to COVID-19 related absences including childcare related absences. The Postal Service has assured us that liberal leave (Sick Leave/Annual Leave/LWOP) will be granted in these situations. The NPMHU has also negotiated an MOU with the Postal Service to allow Mail Handlers to use up to 80-hours of Sick Leave for Dependent Care (SLDC) to provide child care in the event of day care closures, school closures, or the unavailability of the child's primary care giver as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The recently enacted Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) also provides additional paid leave (up to 80 hours) for certain COVID-19 related absences and up to 12 weeks of paid leave to provide for childcare needed because of the virus.

The Postal Service has agreed with us that COVID-19 related absences should be recorded as a "scheduled" absence and not be used as a basis for discipline or for termination during probationary periods.

We have also negotiated leave benefits for MHAs with regard to COVID-19 absences. This MOU provides up to 80 hours of paid leave for each MHA's COVID-19 absences (including providing child care).

To address the understaffing of Mail Handlers as a result of the large number of COVID-19 related absences, we have negotiated an MOU that allows the Postal Service to exceed the allowable percentages for MHAs for a period of 60 days. The MOU also ensures that those Mail Handlers on the Overtime Desired List will not be adversely affected by the hiring of the extra MHAs.

The health and safety of our members continues to be our priority. We will continue to ensure that the Postal Service complies with its own protocols by providing the necessary supplies (gloves, masks, hand sanitizers, wipes and cleaning materials), performing the necessary cleanings on a



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regular basis, keeping employees informed by giving daily stand up talks, and keeping our members protected by following the quarantine recommendations of the CDC.

The CDC and the World Health Organization, as well as the U.S. Surgeon General, have all said that there is a very low risk of the coronavirus being spread through the mail.

However, if you are sick or not feeling well or feel that your health or safety is at risk, stay home and immediately report your condition to your supervisor. We will figure out the type of leave to which you are entitled, and we will file the appropriate grievances, if necessary.

The Postal Service recently issued FAQs regarding COVID-19 including the following Question and Answer:

“Q: I want to go home. I don’t feel safe to work here now.”

“A: Employees who do not feel safe working in the facility may be allowed to take emergency annual leave or leave without pay, to the extent feasible. The Postal Service will follow a liberal leave usage policy for employees.”

It is crucial that lines of communication among the Postal Service, unions, and employees remain open. It is equally as important that all our members be kept informed of the latest developments. Please read your bulletin boards and visit our website (NPMHU.org) and our mobile APP on a regular basis to obtain the latest information. We must be vigilant about how we go about our business, but we must remain as calm as possible. We will all get through this together. Please stay safe.

If you have any questions, please contact your steward or another Union Representative.

Paul Hogrogian
President/NPMHU