



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
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Eastern Region

David E. Wilkin
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Lawrence B. Sapp
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Don J. Sneesby
Vice President
Western Region

Message from President Paul Hogrogian

April 2, 2020

Brothers and Sisters,

The NPMHU applauds the heroic efforts of our Mail Handlers from around the country, as well as those of all postal workers. All have answered the call to perform essential federal service under the extraordinary circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The services provided include delivering prescriptions, test kits and other much needed medical supplies, delivering social security and other pension checks, delivering the stimulus checks once they are issued, delivering census materials and election ballots, delivering much needed supplies purchased through e-commerce, and continuing to provide Rural America with the service on which they depend. The American public depends on the Post Office and Mail Handlers. All postal workers have stepped up and provided the services that they need. However, Mail Handlers deserve to be provided with the protections that they need in order to do their job as safely as they can.

When I last reported to you regarding the coronavirus (COVID-19) on March 25, 2020, there were 65 postal workers who were confirmed to be COVID-19 positive. There are currently (as of April 2, 2020) 269 postal workers who have tested positive and 241 employees who have been presumed to be positive for a total of 510 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 rapidly changing circumstances. 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 Level 3 countries (China, South Korea, Iran and most of Europe) or returning from all cruise ships will be told to self-quarantine for 14 days and will be paid Administrative Leave.
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 Administrative Leave. There have been reports from the field that this is not being complied with in all postal facilities. Please report any violation of this protocol to your Union representative.



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3. Those employees found to be COVID-19 positive will not be allowed to return to work for at least 14 days and will require medical clearance in order to return to work.
4. 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.”
5. 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.)
6. Supplies (Gloves/Masks/Hand Sanitizers/Wipes) are to be made available. (A problem has arisen where some of the supplies destined for the Postal Service have justifiably been diverted to Health Care Providers. We have been assured that these supplies will be replenished as soon as possible. Senior Postal Management has reported to the NPMHU that 361,000 bottles of hand sanitizers are being delivered to all postal facilities and that supplies of gloves and surgical masks are continually being replenished. 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
4. Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues, then throw tissue in trash
5. Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces
6. Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
7. Use a 60-percent alcohol-based hand sanitizer



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- 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.

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 is in effect with regard to COVID-19 related absences. An extremely large number of schools have been forced to close because of the outbreak of COVID-19. This has left many of our members searching for alternate childcare or being forced to stay home from work. The Postal Service has assured us that liberal leave (Annual Leave/LWOP) will be granted in these situations. The NPMHU has also negotiated an MOU with the Postal Service to help address these circumstances. The MOU will 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 new MOU provides up to 80 hours of paid leave for each MHA's COVID-19 absences (including providing childcare). This is extremely important for MHAs since they have very limited leave balances. They do not receive Sick Leave, are not eligible for Administrative Leave, and must "cash out" their Annual Leave at the end of each appointment. It was imperative that we provide MHAs with some form of wage protection in the event of COVID-19 related absences.

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.



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The health and safety of our members continues to be our priority. We will 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 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. 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 we maintain an open line of communication among the Postal Service, unions, and employees. It is also equally as important that all our members be kept informed of the latest developments. Please read your bulletin board 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