

Latest round of rural carrier route evaluations maintains attack on US postal workers' pay

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Are you a rural letter carrier? Tell us how the latest mail count affected your pay by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

The United States Postal Service (USPS) completed its second round of route counts under its new Rural Route Evaluated Compensation System (RRECS) last week. The hated compensation system was first launched this spring to disastrous effects for rural letter carriers, resulting in massive pay cuts for around two-thirds of the rural workforce, in some cases by \$10,000 or even \$20,000 a year.

Rural letter carriers at USPS work under a de facto piece rate system. Instead of being paid by the number of hours worked, the post office periodically “evaluates” the workload for every route, which it then uses to calculate compensation for each worker. Even before the RRECS evaluation system, the periods in which these counts take place were infamous among carriers for sudden and unexplained drops in volumes, which could be conveniently used to underestimate the true value of a route.

Many workers are overburdened, working well beyond what the evaluation says their workload is. Responding to the latest round of evaluations on *Rural Mail Talk*, many workers noted that their coverage (the average percent of addresses delivered to on a route) was evaluated at significantly lower than the actual work of their route.

From the latest evaluations some people saw small adjustments. *The American Prospect* reported that one postal worker regained \$6,000 a year on a \$15,000 pay cut from the original evaluation, while another saw a two-hour cut to their evaluation. However, instead of correcting the overburden of work on postal workers, the USPS instead shifted worker’s hours over a six-day work week, minimizing the impact of the adjustment.

The National Rural Letter Carriers Association (NRLCA) has not yet published figures on how the re-evaluation has impacted workers. Figures from the union on the first round noted that two-thirds of workers lost income from the new system. It is not yet clear how the new round will affect workers at large, but the response of workers to the new round indicates that many workers saw no improvement or only gained a couple hours back on their evaluation.

Several workers who spoke with the WSWS noted that the RRECS system often counts cluster boxes, where dozens of mailboxes at an apartment building or trailer park are gathered together in a single location, as a single address. The system therefore massively underestimates the time it takes to deliver mail and packages at these locations.

“The cluster boxes have the most mail since it’s being calculated as one stop, one box,” said a rural carrier. “A carrier should not carry more than a handful. Management wants us to load it all in one trip, as if we carry extra hands with us!”

RRECS is only one of multiple new intrusive tracking systems introduced at USPS under the “Delivering for America” restructuring program. Mimicking similar systems at Amazon and other private logistics firms, scanners track “downtime” and any pauses in work that it thinks it detects as well as the number of dismounts that a driver makes from his or her vehicle.

When asked about their evaluation, one worker said of their coworkers’ evaluations that “theirs dropped even more, mine went up by only one hour per week. All of our mileage is off, and none of my cluster boxes are counted. Eval says I carry 58 percent of my route daily. You and I both know I’d get fired for delaying the mail if I took a little over half my route everyday. It makes no sense!”

The worker continued, “Carriers who chose the ‘high option’ on their J routes, which made it a J route, are being told that if they bid to another route they will lose that option. That doesn’t make sense. They’ve worked a certain number of years to get that option and were never told it was a one-time deal.”

Another added, “We really need to start [an] investigation of RRECS. Where’s the data that shows how they calculate this BS? Who is inputting the manual entries of data required by each station? No one! Why? ‘Keep the knowledge to yourself’ is the USPS policy for leadership. When supervisors and even postmasters are asked about RRECS evaluations, you routinely hear, ‘I don’t know.’”

What the latest round of RRECS evaluation demonstrates is that the USPS did not simply make a mistake the first time. RRECS is working just as intended, with only slight modifications, to massively slash wages for rural carriers and drive thousands out of the post office altogether by creating endless loopholes for management to deny workers compensation.

RRECS is an important part of the Delivering for America program, which in reality is aimed at destroying much of the post office’s infrastructure and preparing for its eventual privatization. Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, a multimillionaire businessman and major Trump backer who also enjoys the support of the Democrats, has publicly declared that his target is to eliminate a minimum of 50,000 jobs, closing thousands of post offices and re-drawing 100,000 routes. USPS will be restructured into an Amazon-style hub and spoke distribution system centered around massive sorting warehouses, leaving sparsely populated areas of the country without access to a nearby post office.

The response of the NRLCA has been to simply tell workers to file a grievance if they are dissatisfied with their evaluation. The grievance process is composed of a statement by the worker, who must then go to management to have their manager write out their response to the grievance. This is a recipe for worker harassment by management and the intimidation of workers to not file grievances out of fear of retaliation. Workers will have until just October 20 to file their grievances over the new count.

NRLCA officials are doing nothing to oppose RRECS because they are the ones that negotiated the system in the first place. RRECS was born out of a decade of negotiations and planning in which the union bureaucracy gave in to every demand of management.

Instead of acknowledging that RRECS has been a massive attack on rural carriers, the NLRCA has doubled down. In an interview with *Federal News Network*, NRLCA President Don Maston said, “The union, I assure you, has been working day and night—countless hours, a lot of sleepless nights on this RRECS—trying to make sure that it’s the most fair and accurate way to evaluate routes.”

Maston added, with contempt for the workers he claims to represent, “That’s not to say that we aren’t empathetic on a human level. People get used to making a certain salary and getting off at a certain time. And it was a great system for that five years, especially with a decline in mail volume. They didn’t have a lot of work to do, and they’re getting off early and getting a very nice salary. But the system was designed to pay carriers for what they actually do, and be fair to the employer and the carriers alike, but still have a substantial incentive built in there.”

In other words, Maston and the NLRCA bureaucracy see rural carriers as lazy and in need of a compensation system more “fair” for DeJoy and USPS management. Don Maston’s total compensation as NRLCA Vice President was \$197,000 in 2022.

These bureaucrats have sold out postal workers and have fully embraced their role as labor police for management. In an August 18 memo DeJoy wrote, “As we continue our transformation to meet the needs of a dynamic and changing business environment, we will, by necessity, continue to adapt to more change. There is one aspect of our transformation that cannot change, and that is our adherence to the provisions of our labor agreements.”

DeJoy is happy to adhere to the provisions of the NRLCA’s labor agreements because they are favorable to him and his plans to privatize the post office.

In opposition to the pro-management orientation of the union apparatus, postal workers have formed the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee to take the struggle of postal workers out of the hands of the bureaucracy and into the hands of workers themselves. In its founding statement, it demanded an immediate end to RRECS and the restoration of all lost wages and an end to all other high-tech surveillance systems at the post office.



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