

Springfield, Massachusetts postal workers describe asbestos, Legionnaires' disease and complicit union officials at major distribution center

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7 May 2026

Postal workers: come forward with your own testimony to the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee's independent investigation into workplace safety! All submissions will be kept anonymous.

Workers at the United States Postal Service' Network Distribution Center Springfield, Massachusetts are speaking out against injuries, contract violations, safety issues and inaction in the face of this by union officials.

Conditions at USPS have deteriorated for many years, but the issue has reached a breaking point since the start of the "Delivering for America" restructuring program begun in 2021. This bipartisan program aims to restructure the post office along Amazon lines, setting the stage for potential privatization. The current financial crisis at USPS—which may run out of money by next year—is being used to further squeeze the workforce. Management has already suspended payments into postal workers' pension plan.

Last month, a group of workers founded a rank-and-file committee at the facility to expose these conditions and to "unite postal workers worldwide to build collective power," according to its founding statement. The committee is "independent of union apparatus, political parties and management," it continues. "It is democratic, transparent and accountable to the shop floor."

The committee is affiliated with the national USPS Worker Rank-and-File Committee, which is conducting an independent investigation into workplace safety. That inquiry was launched last November, after the deaths of postal workers Nick Acker in Michigan and Russell Scruggs, Jr in Georgia.

The testimony given in this article by the Springfield workers, whose names have been withheld to protect them from retaliation, is part of that investigation.

Workers describe the physical environment as hazardous and unsanitary. "They were doing asbestos remediation two weeks ago," one worker said. "There were no notices taking place or communication from management. At no point did I see or hear the union [The American Postal Workers Union, APWU] going to investigate it. I did not see the safety coordinator inspecting the area. People could have been exposed to it. No precautions were taken whatsoever. The area being remediated was right outside of a supervisor's area. I'm concerned about anyone who was working in that part of the facility who could have breathed in asbestos. Anyone who used the break room or the restroom could have tracked it around."

Disease is also present in the facility. "Last summer, we heard unofficially that a maintenance employee who had been working on the HVAC system got sick with Legionnaires' disease. He was out of work for a week. If he hadn't been young and healthy, it could have been fatal

to him. There was no official communication whatsoever from management. No one confirmed it was safe to use the HVAC system."

A co-worker added: "Legionnaires disease was found in our vents and asbestos and they do not secure areas or block them off. The person who found this was the union safety advocate. I don't trust OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Administration]. They said within a week or two they cleaned it. I don't believe it. The air is stagnant and not fresh."

On the HVAC system, another worker added "Our vent system is years and years old. It has not been updated. Air quality is terrible. It is very often too warm and very rarely a comfortable temperature. ... There is not proper airflow through the building. Some areas are cool while it is very hot in other portions of the building.

The worker added: "If you look at the vents around the building, they are riddled with a black substance. I don't know the last time they have been cleaned. The vents circulate the air we are breathing. Management says that the vents have been cleaned but, they visibly have not been. I never had allergies until I began working at the post office. When we say the vents are dirty, they say we'll clean them but they never get cleaned. Management indicates on paper that they have addressed the issues, when in reality they never get addressed."

Infestations and waste are present in the facility. "We consistently see rodent droppings; have seen some large droppings," another worker said. "I have seen mice myself. Management says we have a contract with an exterminator. They don't indicate how often the exterminator comes in or what they do. They sit out for days after I report them.

"I used to keep my food in a refrigerator, but that was taken away. Management told me I need to keep my food in a cooler bag. [They ignored my] concerns about keeping it in a rodent infested locker room and no remedy was provided."

Another said, "All over the facility garbage seems to accumulate. There are rolling carts with garbage that are left by the trash compactor, sometimes for several days without being emptied into the compactor. There are other areas in the building where garbage has contaminated mail for weeks at a time."

"Many of these boxes contain rotting fruit, fruit flies. Last summer there was a rolling cart with garbage and with maggots falling out and crawling across the floor. There were hundreds of them. It's an ongoing issue and never seems to get better." This was echoed by another worker: "There is rotting food and meat that is not removed unless workers throw it in the trash. There are maggots. There should be an investigation."

Workplace Safety and Operational Negligence

One worker describes how they were hurt on the job. "I fell in the parking lot on marble rocks. They refuse to sweep and clean here and don't care. I was injured and taken off of the clock after I got a ride to the ER. I was ignored by the first supervisor; a second supervisor and manager made me wait for 5 1/2 hours for paperwork. A lot of people have fallen on those rocks. They should not be there and were put there for decorations. Other people have fallen. They are still there. Management was well aware of people falling on them."

Machinery is also a cause for concern. One said, "There have been many accidents with fork lifts. A mail handler was driven over by a fork lift. He needed stitches, the back of his foot was split open. He was out of work for about 2 weeks. Management won't offer limited duty. They tell them there is no work for him and make them stay home without pay."

Another worker spoke about stress from overwork. "With the understaffing, I deal with a set of PSM's (parcel sorting machines). Because management has started to remove bids in an effort to save money, we have lost jobs on these machines. As a result, a single employee has been forced to work multiple machines that had been worked by two or three employees. This presents a safety hazard because you have less people doing more work. It becomes a physical and mental strain. When we inform management, they tell us that the employees need to make sure they are working safely. However, when the mail volume builds up on these machines, management will intimidate employees and imply that they need to work quicker and more efficiently."

Inadequate emergency response is a major concern. One worker recalled, "There had been an incident where a new employee threatened to shoot another employee. The building was not evacuated. The building was not searched. There was no firearm safety protocol from management. It happened on a night shift. Eventually all three shifts learned about it. A few days after work, my supervisor gave a stand-up talk about what to do if there is an active shooter in the building. The stand-up talk lasted five to ten minutes at most and did not address the recent threat at our facility."

Fire alarms and drills are given short shrift. The worker continued, "In general, fire evacuation procedure is very disorganized. Many employees are unclear about which exit to use and the meeting points after the evacuation. There is not good communication from management."

"In February 2026 there was a power outage in the building and workers were not told to go home. The fire alarms were useless and they still kept people in the building. In general, it's very poor communication and there is no discussion about the use of fire extinguishers as well. There is a \$40,000 fine but no one seems to enforce it."

Management Misconduct, Retaliation and Discrimination

Workers describe a culture of "power plays" and retaliation by management. "There has been a pattern of adverse action when filing an EEO [Equal Employment Opportunity discrimination complaint], grievance or email complaints. I filed several complaints. They respond with an increase of scrutiny, including discipline by PDI (pre-disciplinary interview) that leads to actual discipline by letter of warning."

"It stays on your record until the union can get it settled. It discourages people from complaining and the union does not support us. People who are in positions of power are bad for workers. It made me a pariah. Things became more brazen."

One worker pointed out that in one EEO case, management had lost

vital documents, ripped up medical notes, and did not properly store medical information under the Privacy Act. "They [the union] fail to provide grievance documentation and updates. There is a conflict of interest with union leadership and representation."

According to another worker, "My job was threatened for no reason; a supervisor demanded that I had to do what she says or I wouldn't be able to come to work; and she would walk me out every day if I did not report to her area first, which is not my assigned area, so we got into a huge argument that only escalated and I ended up leaving work and calling the OIG [Office of the Inspector General] to investigate her."

Union in bed with management

There is a profound lack of confidence in the union's willingness to defend workers' contractual rights. One worker noted, "Management continually, blatantly violates the union contract. They tell us to 'just grieve it later,' knowing that our union leadership is weak and constantly makes deals with management that do not benefit our workforce."

Another pointed out, "Management has become so emboldened in violating our contract as well as federal law and our local union is incredibly weak. Jobs are being reverted right and left. With the structure of our current union, workers are stuck with inadequate representation for three years at a time since it's so difficult to remove elected officials. Our workplace cannot continue to function like this. I am concerned for the future of the entire postal service and the loss of tens of thousands of jobs."

In the founding statement, the workers who founded the Springfield NDC rank-and-file explained, "we will continue to lose ground unless we form independent rank-and-file committees to advocate for our rights, investigate violations and wrongdoings, address safety concerns and educate our coworkers."

The conditions documented here are precisely what the committee has been founded to combat. Its answer is not to pressure the union bureaucracy or management, but to expose these conditions build a structure that is, in their own words, "by the worker, for the worker"—democratic, transparent, and accountable to the shop floor alone.



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