

# Third Dallas-area postal worker dies in three years amid extreme heat

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*USPS workers: provide anonymous testimony to the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Safety Inquiry by filling out the form below. For more information about the inquiry, click here.*

Umeshkumar Thakkar, a 58-year-old rural letter carrier died Monday while delivering mail in the Dallas, Texas suburb of Little Elm during a heat advisory and triple-digit temperatures. He had worked for US Postal Service (USPS) since 2022. His family and friends held a funeral for him Thursday afternoon.

The temperature reached 102 degrees (39 C) Monday and 108 (42 C) on both Tuesday and Wednesday. Surveillance footage shows Thakkar's postal vehicle stopped near Thornhill Lane and Graystone Drive with its hazard lights on at about 12:20 p.m.. Neighbor Ximena Ayala recalled seeing fire trucks, about five patrol cars and someone "looking inside of the mail car, looking frantic on the phone," according to Fox 4.

Manny Ortiz told the station that he returned from the gym to find the vehicle in front of his mailbox and emergency crews on his lawn. "They said the postman passed out," he said. "They shouldn't be working in this heat." A 911 call came around 2 p.m.. Firefighters attempted CPR, but Thakkar was pronounced dead at the scene.

"I think it's terrible," a Texas postal worker told the WSW. "I think that by this time they should have air-conditioning trucks where people can take at least a little bit of a break and get some fresh cool air. It is extremely hot in the Texas area. There is no excuse for this. They are really out of control. My question is how many people have to die before they realize that the heat is too much or for them to even care about showing some compassion for people and treating us like human beings instead of dogs?"

Authorities have not determined the official cause of death or when Thakkar lost consciousness during the roughly 100 minutes his vehicle remained stopped.

The vehicle appears to be one of the aging Grumman Long Life Vehicles, or LLVs, which have no air conditioning. Workers routinely record temperatures above 120 degrees (49 C) inside such vehicles.

Thakkar is the third Dallas-Fort Worth postal carrier in just over three years to die on his route amid dangerous heat.

On June 20, 2023, 66-year-old Dallas carrier Eugene Gates Jr. collapsed and died while working during an excessive heat

warning, when the heat index reached 113 degrees (45 C). An autopsy found that heat exposure and heart disease caused his death. Gates, a 36-year veteran of USPS, had recently been disciplined for a "stationary event" detected through USPS' electronic surveillance system. Management had also pushed back start times, forcing carriers to work later into the hottest part of the day.

After Gates' death, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration cited USPS for failing to protect workers from "high outdoor heat including high temperature, high humidity and direct sun exposure." It proposed a derisory fine of \$15,625 and identified elementary measures that management could take, including earlier start times, monitoring employees, adequate rest breaks and acclimatization.

On June 21, 2025, 51-year-old Dallas carrier Jacob Taylor collapsed while delivering mail in the late afternoon, also amid triple-digit temperatures. His death was never officially established as heat-related, but it occurred under the same basic conditions: strenuous outdoor labor during the hottest part of the day and in an aging vehicle without air conditioning.

Workers around the country are routinely forced to work in punishing heat. A 2024 USPS inspector general report counted 1,332 heat-related accidents from fiscal year 2022 through June 2024. More than half—714—resulted in missed work time and potential injury, including heat exhaustion and heat stroke.

During a late-June heat wave, carriers at one installation refused to begin their routes and remained in the break room until management supplied water. At other facilities, carriers working in heat indices above 100 degrees (38 C) reported receiving no bottled water, with only sinks and a poorly functioning drinking fountain available.

Delivery workers at UPS, FedEx, Amazon and other companies confront the same combination of extreme temperatures, uncooled vehicles and relentless production demands.

In Tyler, Texas, a UPS driver reportedly collapsed from heat and had to call 911 himself. Teamsters Local 767 alleged that workers had been instructed not to call emergency services for heat incidents; UPS said it was investigating. At the company's Knoxville, Tennessee hub, workers were "physically lying on the floor," according to Teamsters Local 519, while supervisors

allegedly walked around them and operations continued.

Canadian wildfire smoke recently drove air-quality readings into the 800s in parts of the US Midwest, even as a Canadian National rail crew was sent into an active fire zone and barely escaped.

### Questions must be answered

Thakkar was a rural Part-Time Flexible (PTF). While this made him a “career” employee, he occupied a lower and more precarious position than a regular carrier with a fixed route. PTF’s can be assigned across multiple routes to cover for absences by other carriers.

Basic questions are raised in Thakkar’s death. How familiar was he with the route he was assigned Monday? When did his shift begin, how many hours had he worked and what was the evaluated workload? Little Elm is one of the fastest-growing cities in the country, with its population rising by more than one-third since 2020. The National Rural Letter Carriers Association (NRLCA) itself filed a national grievance in 2025 over USPS’s failure to adjust overburdened rural routes in a timely manner.

What did management’s tracking system show between 12:20 and 2 p.m.? Did any supervisor see that the vehicle had stopped, and did anyone attempt to contact or check on Thakkar? Who discovered him and placed the 911 call? A system built to detect supposedly “unproductive” minutes must be used to protect life, not extract more work.

Postal workers must organize to get answers to these questions. The USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee, founded in opposition to both management and pro-management union bureaucrats, has launched an investigation into a series of recent deaths of postal workers, including the death of Nick Acker last November in a mail sort machine in Michigan and four deaths in a two year span at the Palmetto, Georgia distribution center.

An independent inquiry is necessary because the official investigation will be a whitewash in which nobody will be held responsible. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration fined USPS a mere \$26,481 for Acker’s death.

These deaths and injuries are the foreseeable outcome of systematic cost-cutting. Under Delivering for America, USPS has eliminated tens of thousands of jobs and consolidated processing into dysfunctional regional hubs, producing chronic understaffing, inadequate training and degraded emergency response. Management is now invoking the \$9 billion loss in fiscal 2025 and a cash crisis to prepare cuts on a historic scale, proposing post office closures, reduced delivery days and ending USPS’ Universal Service Obligation to provide equal service across the entire country.

The response of NRLCA President Don Maston to Thakkar’s death essentially reproduced the language of a management press release. “The safety and well-being of every postal employee must remain the highest priority,” he said. “As temperatures continue to reach dangerous levels across much of the country, the NRLCA urges all rural letter carriers to remain vigilant, follow established heat safety protocols, stay hydrated, recognize the signs of heat-related illness, and look out for one another.”

Maston did not identify a single management decision that must be investigated or changed. He made no demand for earlier start times, route relief, air-conditioned vehicles, mandatory check-ins or an independent investigation. The union said only that it would “monitor” the investigation being conducted by USPS. Even the appeal that isolated carriers “look out for one another” is hollow when they work alone across dispersed routes.

Carriers have repeatedly complained that USPS refuses to move start times forward during heat waves and that overburdened routes keep them on the street through the hottest hours. Any pauses needed to cool down, obtain water or recover can place them at risk of interrogation or discipline for stationary time.

This exposes the real function of the Postal Service’s Heat Illness Prevention Program. The program instructs workers to hydrate, recognize symptoms, take breaks and call 911 “if able.” These measures do not alter the conditions producing heat illness. They transfer responsibility onto the individual worker while management retains control over start times, route length, staffing, workload and discipline.

A serious heat-protection program would impose binding obligations on management: earlier start times, reduced workloads, paid work-rest cycles, air-conditioned vehicles, mandatory welfare checks, a buddy or check-in system and suspension of outdoor work at dangerous heat thresholds. Instead, a worker developing heat stroke—an illness that can rapidly impair judgment and physical capacity—is told that it is his responsibility to recognize the danger and save himself.

Postal workers must organize independently to enforce earlier starts, air-conditioned vehicles, route relief, paid heat breaks, temperature limits and immediate welfare checks without discipline for heat-related stationary time.



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