

POSTAL NEWS

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1. Debate over mail delivery continues

By MARIANNE KOBAK - Business Editor

25 April 2009

ELKO — The debate over the efficiency of mail delivery in Elko continues between the U.S. Postal Service and its union employees in Elko, with one union official fearful of the long-term impact on postal jobs in the area.

Union employees are afraid all of Elko's mail — not just Saturday's, as is happening now — will be sorted in Salt Lake City if the efficiency or Delivery Point Sequencing percentages continue to be lower than 92 percent.

Further, Simon Sanchez Jr., president of the American Postal Workers Union Local 1992, said he is worried the poor performance rating will shut down Elko's sorting station and all local mail will be sorted in Salt Lake.

"The poor performer is the one shut down," he said. "That's the motivation."

"That will never happen," U.S. Postal Service spokesman David Rupert said when asked about that possibility. "That's not even part of the conversation."

Citing postal service standards that target an efficiency level of 92 percent or better, Sanchez said the efficiency level in Elko has dropped to as low as 64 percent.

According to Postal Service reports, efficiency levels have been below 92 percent almost every day since Elko's sorting machines were turned off.

Sanchez said efficiency levels are determined by postal service computers. The computers take the number of pieces of mail processed by the machines and subtract the amount of items the machines did not sort properly. Sanchez said local mail hand-sorted by Elko employees does not count toward the efficiency level.

Rupert said Elko's numbers are "totally within acceptability" because all the local mail has to be hand-sorted to be in walking order.

"If all of your mail is being run through a machine, 92 percent is standard," Rupert said. "We do have goals and we like to see it in the 90s, but for Elko they're doing exactly as expected."

Rupert said the postal service knew from the beginning Elko's efficiency percentages would decline once the sorting machines were turned off March 23.

"Efficiency is the wrong word," Rupert said "It's a percentage of the walk sequence."

He said all mail is postmarked in Elko the day it is mailed. Even mail sent Saturday morning will be postmarked or canceled in Elko that day.

"As long as it's delivered on Monday, what does it matter?" Rupert said about Saturday's mail. "The bottom line is when it gets delivered. ... When I was postmaster

in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, the mail was sent to Rock Springs, which is 250 miles away. It works. We did that six days a week. It's exactly the same situation as Elko." Sanchez said when Twin Falls mail was sent to Boise for sorting, "it didn't work" so the Postal Service went back to the old system.

Sanchez said the Elko machines would put the mail in the correct walking order for delivery. He said when mail is received from Salt Lake, the mail is not in the correct order, so employees must spend time hand-sorting the mail.

"In Salt Lake they're just running it through because they don't care," Sanchez said. "They've made the 92 percent one time."

"The outlying areas used to get their mail in walking order, now it's all mixed up," he said. "They spend a lot more time trying to get them in the right boxes."

Sanchez said the sorting equipment has not been removed from Elko yet.

"As long as the machines are still there we can turn the machines back on once they change their minds," Sanchez said. "The employees understand they can't afford a new machine, or that it's not cost effective. Why not keep it (the old machine) running as long as we can?"

Rupert said the machine in Elko was shut down because of its age.

"The Multi Line Optical Character Reader machine in Elko is a 30-year-old piece of equipment that is no longer supported by the Postal Service," he said in a statement.

"The machine has been decommissioned nationwide. No parts — including the electronic circuit boards — are being manufactured. Once any salvage stock is exhausted, the machines are completely unusable. The software that runs the machine will no longer be updated or maintained, either.

"Additionally, there is no longer any maintenance training being provided for the machine, so once the current technicians are no longer employed, we cannot train a replacement."

Rupert said the "baseline" for Elko's efficiency is being determined now.

"Next year they're going to have to get better," he said. "This is the trade off to keep our promise of keeping the local mail local. It's working the way it is now. You drop the mail in the box and it gets delivered the next day. The most important thing is what the customers see."

Customers can voice their complaints or praises to the Postal Service

Sanchez said he wants customers to be aware the postal service has sent out surveys asking if they are satisfied.

"We're asking the public to please respond," he said. "If the service is good, tell them — if it's bad tell them too. If they send out 10,000 surveys and get only six responses that it's bad, then everything's fine."

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2. TNT Post Pay Cut Rejected By Unions

24 April 2009 by Steve Lawson - © Hellmail.co.uk

A proposed 15% pay cut by Dutch-owned TNT Post has been rejected by three unions, the BVPP, CNV, and now the FNV.

TNT Post had announced a pay cut that it said was necessary in the light of increased competition and would secure jobs for six years but the plan has been rejected by postal unions.

TNT Post is facing similar problems to other mail operators around the world with business being lost to e-mail and annual decline in stamped mail. TNT Post said without urgent savings, job losses of around 11,000 employees would be the only other option. Reducing mail delivery days from the present six has not been ruled out.

Despite this, TNT Post is still thought to be a frontrunner in the partial sale of the Royal Mail although Lord Mandelson, currently spearheading the sale as part of the Postal Services Bill, admitted it was becoming difficult to find a buyer. Deutsche Post DHL said it could see no strategic value in buying into Royal Mail.

The Communication Workers Union along with many Labour MPs have criticised the sale, described by Lord Mandelson as a 'strategic partnership', saying that the service should remain wholly in public hands and that the full asking price could not be realised in a global recession.

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3. As volume of mail decreases, Postal boxes Service drops collection

by John Paul
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MISHAWAKA — Walking a few extra blocks to mail your letters might become part of your routine if you live in Mishawaka. The postmaster said 12 collection boxes were removed because of low volume.

Mail carrier Debbie St. Clair is on the move.

During her routes, she's a friendly and familiar face. Before her walks up and down stairs to mailbox after mailbox, Debbie has noticed her load is much lighter.

"I've been with the Post Office about a year and a half now and I've noticed about a 50 percent decrease in the amount of mail I'm carrying," said St. Clair.

It's not a local problem.

The U.S. Postal Service has noticed a significant drop in volume — nearly 5 percent.

Officials say the USPS is on track to deliver 180 billion pieces of mail this year. That's down significantly from 212 billion pieces delivered just two years ago.

So where's the mail going?

"It's a combination of different things," said St. Clair.

Postal employees say bulk mailers are down and more people are using the Web.

"I think people are opting to use the Internet to pay their bills," St. Clair said. "I've seen companies solicit to me to receive my bills online so they don't have to mail it to me anymore."

The decline in volume is more evident. Bolts in the ground outside the Autumn Lakes apartments show the blue collection box's former location.

"Volume was really, really down in those," said St. Clair.

Twelve boxes throughout Mishawaka, including a site near Capital Avenue and 12th, were removed about 45 to 60 days ago.

"It's a tool that the Post Office provides to make it easier for our customers to do business with us," St. Clair said.

With declining use — St. Clair found about a dozen pieces of mail in the boxes — a lighter load is a burden off Debbie's back and shoulders.

"That's the plus side," said St. Clair.

But with fewer people using the service, she wishes that wasn't the case.

Mishawaka's postmaster said there are no plans to remove any additional boxes.

Throughout the country, more than 4,000 boxes were removed.

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