

USPS is seeking to address these sources of friction. Some efforts have been collaborations between management and the unions, while in other cases some unions and management have disagreed. In order to eliminate these sources of friction, USPS management, unions, and management associations must work together. A sea change in attitudes of all the parties—and an environment of trust—will be required to slash the number of grievances and reshape compensation systems. This will require a sustained effort.

Based on these findings, the Commission developed recommendations to improve USPS programs to prevent violence and to address potential underlying causes of workplace violence and tension. We hope that other employers and labor leaders across America will find these analyses and recommendations useful, and we encourage them to make a searching examination of the unacceptable level of violence in the American workplace.

MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS

USPS should:

1. Screen more carefully for signals of potential violence among job applicants.
2. Define more clearly the meaning of its policy of "zero tolerance" for violence and take steps to assure that employees understand the policy.
3. Continue violence awareness training for employees. Unions should play a greater role in such training.
4. Assure that warning signals are heeded by improving operation of local teams established to assess threats of violence and respond to violent crises. Take steps to assure that employees understand how they can report threats and violence.
5. Improve systems for tracking violence and potential violence.
6. To help assure safety and security for its workers: (a) establish communication systems such as cell phones or beepers for carriers on delivery

routes, especially in high-crime and remote areas, and (b) educate employees about facility security.

7. Mount a major effort to assure employees of the confidentiality of the employee assistance program (EAP) and that the program will not be used as a punishment, and encourage joint local management/union oversight of the EAP.
8. Limit the potential for violence during and after employee terminations by training managers and union officials how to handle terminations.
9. Increase training to develop better interpersonal skills of supervisors and managers.
10. Strengthen incentives to focus managers on the workplace environment in addition to financial performance, operational goals, and customer satisfaction.

USPS management, unions, and management associations should:

1. Overhaul the dispute resolution processes, which are a significant source of frustration and tension for employees and managers.
2. Agree on a system of financial performance incentives for craft (union) employees.

In addition, the Commission notes that the statutory pay ceiling may prevent USPS from attracting the best managers and effectively rewarding good performance of all postal workers. We recommend that Congress consider raising or eliminating the pay ceiling.

Security

The chief postal inspector is the security officer for the Postal Service. The Postal Inspection Service approves expenditures for security personnel or devices in excess of USPS standards. There are USPS security coordinators at the area level and security control officers (SCOs) at the facility level.

Most facilities employ some type of access control, ranging from controlling the issuance of keys at a facility to sophisticated computer access control systems, including access cards and associated hardware (mantraps, turnstiles, etc.). In selected facilities, clear plexiglass partitions form a physical barrier between front line post office personnel and the general public.

Additional security measures in some facilities include:

- * closed-circuit TV systems to view parking lots, building exteriors, post office box areas, and designated high-value locations, such as registry areas;
- * concealed lookout galleries that run throughout a workroom floor; and
- * alarms and sensors.

All employees are charged with the responsibility of preventing unauthorized individuals, including off-duty employees, from entering restricted areas. To ensure postal safety, employees are expected to report all unsafe building or working conditions to their supervisor or their local SCO. Employees are also expected to report any disturbances or improper conduct on the part of individuals while on postal premises.

The Postal Service has a proprietary security force of approximately 1,500 postal police officers at 56 postal facilities in major metropolitan areas. Their duties and responsibilities are limited to postal-controlled property. They have no authority to

pursue suspects beyond postal property. State and local police have the same jurisdictional rights on postal property as on any private property, if their activities do not unduly interfere with postal operations or violate federal laws. An exception is property designated as exclusive jurisdiction.

The Postal Inspection Service may authorize a contract security force at selected postal installations, consisting of unarmed, uniformed personnel assigned to provide perimeter security and access control. In an emergency, facility managers may obtain temporary contract security without prior approval but must notify the local inspector in charge as soon as possible. The Postal Inspection Service conducts background checks on contract security personnel, but vendors reportedly sometimes assign substitutes when guards prescreened by the Inspection Service are unavailable. The security firms are also required by contract to conduct background checks of their employees, including fingerprinting.

The Postal Service piloted a training program in 1992 for SCOs in the Chicago area. Since 1995, the Inspection Service has provided ongoing training for facility SCOs and their Inspection Service liaisons.

Letter carriers on delivery routes do not routinely carry cell phones or radios, but some postal districts have provided cell phones to carriers under a variety of arrangements. In several localities, local telephone companies have donated cell phones, sometimes programmed to dial only 911 or the local post office. In some localities, the carriers' use of cell phones is a cooperative arrangement with local law enforcement, with the twin goals of providing security for carriers and enhancing community safety, because carriers can call for help if they observe emergencies. Some localities provide cell phones to individual carriers if they have been threatened or assaulted.

sults of drug and alcohol testing are not included in the workplace environment indicators. Data on mental health fitness-for-duty exams and threat assessment activity are not used or even collected at a national level.

Troubled Work Sites

USPS has established a process for identifying work sites with a potential for violence and developing plans to reduce risk. A committee of managers and union and management association representatives oversees the process. Committee members and others may nominate sites with systemic work climate problems to be designated as troubled by the committee. As of April, 2000, there were 61 sites (out of 38,000 facilities) on the "troubled work site" list, ranging from small post offices to major facilities.

In 1998, the Office of Inspector General audited this process and recommended clarifying the criteria for troubled work sites. The committee made changes in response. Nevertheless, while some field managers and union officials consider the process useful, some still do not understand the process or consider it helpful. One union official said, "We are pleased with how the process has evolved....We have learned to trust each other. In many instances we have been able to resolve, calm down, and correct serious problems. I couldn't be more pleased." In contrast, another union official said the process "caused us a lot of problems because they just pulled names out of a hat."

Sharing Best Practices

Many postal districts have initiated promising approaches to violence prevention at the local level. Headquarters supports the sharing of local experiences through an internal Web site describing local initiatives, informal communication, and occasional conferences.

The Commission recommends that USPS:

- * **Integrate additional information related to violence into the work environment indicators, such as aggregate data on threats and assaults, threat assessment activity, drug and**

alcohol test results, and patterns in EAP use and mental health fitness-for-duty exams.

- * **Make work environment indicators available for units within performance clusters.**
- * **Clarify the criteria and process for designating troubled work sites.**
- * **Intensify the sharing of best local practices in violence prevention.**

SECURITY

Some postal employees have the impression that their facilities are not secure. These perceptions are at odds with generally low rates of violence against employees by outsiders.

Some letter carriers are fearful on their delivery routes and feel the need for a communications system. Letter carriers on delivery routes do not routinely carry cell phones or radios, although some districts provide cell phones to some carriers.

Letter carriers have low rates of physical assault by outsiders, but nine of the 14 postal victims of homicides by non-employees were city or rural carriers. Comments from letter carriers included "The most insecure place is out there in the vehicle. We need a communication system;" "First of the month, when you've got all those checks...;" "I had a flat tire and I had to wait until another carrier came by with a cell phone."

The Commission recommends that USPS:

- * **Establish a communication system for carriers on delivery routes, especially in high-crime and remote areas.**
- * **Educate employees about facility security.**

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The employee assistance program (EAP) offers free, voluntary, confidential counseling to assist all postal employees and their families with personal, emotional, work-related, and substance abuse problems. Employee workplace intervention analysts in each