

*Report of the*

United States  
Postal Service Commission  
On A Safe and Secure  
Workplace

*August 2000*



*Prepared by*  
THE NATIONAL CENTER ON  
ADDICTION AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE  
AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

The United States  
Postal Service Commission  
On A Safe And Secure  
Workplace

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UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE COMMISSION  
ON A SAFE AND SECURE WORKPLACE

August 31, 2000

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The Honorable William J. Henderson  
Postmaster General  
United States Postal Service  
475 L'Enfant Plaza SW, Room 10022  
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Dear Mr. Henderson,

I am pleased to transmit to you the Report of the United States Postal Service Commission on A Safe and Secure Workplace.

You charged the Commission to develop concrete recommendations that the Postal Service might adopt to provide its employees at 38,000 post offices and related facilities with the safest possible workplace environments. In carrying out this mandate over the past two years, the Commission examined all aspects of workplace violence and related issues. In order to measure the situation in postal workplaces against that in others, we conducted the most comprehensive national survey ever undertaken on the topic of workplace violence. We held interviews and focus groups with hundreds of postal employees throughout the nation, and analyzed mountains of national and Postal Service data.

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Our bottom line conclusions are:

- \* "Going postal" is a myth, a bad rap. Postal workers are no more likely to physically assault, sexually harass, or verbally abuse their coworkers than employees in the national workforce.
- \* Postal employees are only a third as likely as those in the national workforce to be victims of homicide at work.
- \* The level of violence throughout the American workplace is unacceptably high: last year, one in twenty workers was physically assaulted, one in six was sexually harassed, and one in three was verbally abused.

We hope that this report will help achieve your goal of making the Postal Service the gold standard for safe and secure workplaces for all American workers and that it will be of use to other public and private employers as well.

You and the entire USPS have provided wholehearted cooperation throughout our work. The Commission would like to extend a special word of appreciation to our director, Naomi Goldstein, who assembled an excellent staff and led the work of the Commission with unusual intelligence and dedication and the highest professional standards.

Sincerely,

Joseph A. Califano, Jr.

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## **Acknowledgements**

Thousands of employees of the Postal Service and in all sectors of the American workforce took the time to complete the Commission's survey questionnaire. Hundreds of Postal Service employees at all levels participated in focus groups and interviews. Union and management association officials at the national, regional, and local levels also participated in lengthy interviews. Postal executives and officials of the postal unions and management associations testified before the Commission. Many experts on workplace violence and the Postal Service provided advice and assistance.

Many postal officials provided materials and information to the Commission. Particular thanks are due to Thomas J. Lang, Kathleen A. Dial, and Robert Bethel, who served as liaisons to the Commission. Suzanne H. Milton and Stephen Barbour also responded to many requests for information.

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Appendices A through F will be available shortly.

# Introduction

On October 6, 1998, Postmaster General William J. Henderson established the United States Postal Service Commission on A Safe and Secure Workplace. The Postmaster General charged the Commission to "detail concrete steps which the Postal Service can take to make its 38,000 post offices and related facilities the safest possible environment for its employees."<sup>1</sup> Joseph A. Califano, Jr., chaired the Commission, which also included Douglas A. Fraser; Beatrix A. Hamburg, M.D.; David A. Hamburg, M.D.; John E. Robson; and Robert B. Zoellick.

The Commission conducted an intensive study that included the most comprehensive survey ever conducted of workplace violence in our nation; numerous visits to postal facilities; focus groups with more than 350 postal employees throughout the nation; interviews of more than 300 United States Postal Service (USPS), union, and management association officials at the national level and in the field; a detailed review of postal policies and practices; an intensive examination of every workplace homicide since 1986 in which postal employees were perpetrators or victims; and extensive analyses of national databases. The Commission gathered information on violence prevention in other workplaces; sought advice from leaders in government, business, and labor; and reviewed hundreds of books and articles in professional journals on the subject of workplace violence.

The Commission held six meetings from January 1999 to April 2000 and heard presentations and testimony from USPS executives and managers, officials of the Postal Inspection Service and the USPS Office of Inspector General, and workplace violence experts and consultants. The four major national unions and three associations representing managers all testified before the Commission.

Throughout our work, the Commission has been conscious of the importance of the universal mail

service that the USPS provides, that it is the finest government mail service in the world, and that postal employees and managers are justly proud of the service they provide to all the American people.

## FINDINGS

### General Conclusions

The Commission's bottom-line conclusions are:

- \* "Going postal" is a myth, a bad rap. Postal workers are no more likely to physically assault, sexually harass, or verbally abuse their coworkers than employees in the national workforce.
- \* Postal employees are only a third as likely as those in the national workforce to be victims of homicide at work.
- \* The level of violence throughout the American workplace is unacceptably high: last year, one in twenty workers was physically assaulted, one in six was sexually harassed, and one in three was verbally abused.

### Death at Work

**Risk of Being Killed.** Of 6,719 workplace homicides from 1992 to 1998, 16 were postal employees. Postal employees are only a third as likely as those in the national workforce to be victims of homicide at work (0.26 vs. 0.77 per 100,000 workers annually in 1992-1998, the period for which comprehensive national data are available). Comparing industries, workers in retail trade (*e.g.*, stores, restaurants, and gas stations) are eight times likelier than postal employees to be victims of homicide at work (2.10 vs. 0.26 per 100,000). Comparing occupations, taxi drivers are 150 times likelier than letter carriers to be victims of homicide at work (31.54 vs. 0.21 per 100,000).

## Members of the United States Postal Service Commission on A Safe and Secure Workplace

**Joseph A. Califano, Jr.** (chair), an attorney, founding Chairman of the Board and President of The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (a multidisciplinary think/action tank); Adjunct Professor of Public Health Policy and Management at the Medical School and School of Public Health at Columbia University; U.S. Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare in the Carter Administration; Special Assistant to President Lyndon B. Johnson from 1965 to 1969; and author of nine books. Mr. Califano was instrumental in establishing the President's Commission on Postal Organization in the 1960s, and served as counsel to the USPS Board of Governors in the early 1980s.

**Douglas A. Fraser**, Professor of Labor Studies at Wayne State University and former President of the United Auto Workers;

**Beatrix A. Hamburg**, M.D., Professor of Psychiatry and Pediatrics at Mount Sinai School of Medicine; Visiting Scholar at Cornell University Medical College; past President of the William T. Grant Foundation; member of the Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences; and an expert in violence issues;

**David A. Hamburg**, M.D., President Emeritus at the Carnegie Corporation of New York; former President of the Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences; and former Chief, Adult Psychiatry Branch of the National Institute of Mental Health;

**John E. Robson**, Senior Advisor at the investment banking firm Robertson Stephens; Distinguished Visiting Fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University; past President and Chief Executive Officer of G.D. Searle & Co.; Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Treasury in the Bush Administration; Chair of the U.S. Civil Aeronautics Board in the Ford Administration; and former Dean of the School of Business Administration at Emory University;

**Robert B. Zoellick**, Resident Fellow and Board Member at the German Marshall Fund of the U.S., Research Scholar at Harvard University, and Senior International Advisor at Goldman, Sachs; former John M. Olin Professor of National Security Affairs at the U.S. Naval Academy; former Executive Vice President of Fannie Mae; Undersecretary of State and White House deputy chief of staff in the Bush Administration, and Counselor to the Secretary of the Treasury in the Reagan Administration.

**Risk of Being Killed by Coworkers and Non-Coworkers.** It is impossible to compare with any precision the likelihood of a postal employee being killed by a coworker or a non-coworker with that of an employee in the national workforce. For USPS, we know that from 1992 through 1998 nine of 16 postal victims were killed by current or former coworkers. Unfortunately, we cannot identify the perpetrator's status in nearly half (46 percent) of all workplace homicides. Unsolved crimes likely explain much of the missing information (31 percent of all murders in 1998 were unsolved<sup>2</sup>), while some may be due to limitations of national data collection procedures.

**Homicides by Postal Employees.** A meticulous examination of workplace homicides committed by

current or former postal employees since 1986 reveals a variety of motives, including robbery, actual and desired intimate relationships, and workplace disputes. But this common denominator emerges: most of the postal perpetrators (14 of 15) had troubled histories of violence, mental health problems, substance abuse, and/or criminal convictions. Five exhibited behavior prior to employment that should have excluded them from being hired.

**Homicides of Postal Employees by Non-Employees.** Homicides of postal employees by non-employees also had varied motives, including robbery, a dispute over a debt, anger over mail not delivered when expected, and intimate relationships. Most non-postal perpetrators had troubled histories as well. Victims all held jobs exposing them to the

public: most were letter carriers or small-town postmasters, and one was a motor vehicle operator.

## **Physical Assault, Sexual Harassment, and Verbal Abuse at Work**

The Commission found a disturbing and unacceptable level of violence in the American workplace: in the past year at work, one in 20 employees in the national workforce was physically assaulted, one in six was sexually harassed, and one in three was verbally abused. USPS employees are no more likely to be subjected to nonfatal violence than workers in the national workforce:

- \* Five percent of postal employees and five percent of employees in the national workforce say they were physically assaulted at work in the past year. These assaults include throwing something, pushing, grabbing, slapping, hitting or kicking, hitting with an object, beating, rape or attempted rape, and the threat or use of weapons.
- \* Fourteen percent of postal employees and 16 percent of employees in the national workforce say they were subject to behavior usually considered sexual harassment at work in the past year. These incidents include talk about sex or comments about the victim's body; repeated unwanted requests for dates; unwanted sexual touching, kissing, or fondling; and threats of rewards or reprisals based on being "nice" to the perpetrator.
- \* Thirty-six percent of postal employees and 33 percent of employees in the national workforce say there were verbally abused at work in the past year. These incidents include provoking arguments, calling names or putting people down in front of others, making people feel inadequate, shouting or swearing, frightening people, and making intimidating or threatening gestures.

**Victimization by Outsiders.** Postal employees are less likely than those in the national workforce to be victims of physical assault, sexual harassment, and

verbal abuse at work by outsiders—customers, friends, relatives, or other non-employees:

- \* Postal employees are one sixth as likely as those in the national workforce to say they were physically assaulted at work in the past year by an outsider (0.4 vs. 2.3 percent).
- \* Postal employees are one third as likely as those in the national workforce to say they were sexually harassed at work in the past year by an outsider (0.8 vs. 2.4 percent).
- \* Postal employees are half as likely as those in the national workforce to say they were verbally abused at work in the past year by an outsider (4 vs. 8 percent).

**Victimization by Coworkers.** Postal employees are about as likely as employees in the national workforce to be victims of physical assault, sexual harassment, and verbal abuse by coworkers—supervisors, subordinates, or other employees:

- \* Four percent of postal employees and three percent of employees in the national workforce say they were physically assaulted at work by a coworker in the past year.
- \* Twelve percent of postal employees and 14 percent of employees in the national workforce say they were sexually harassed at work by a coworker in the past year.
- \* Thirty percent of postal employees and 25 percent of employees in the national workforce say they were verbally abused at work by a coworker in the past year.

## **Fears About Workplace Violence**

Although they are not, in fact, more likely to be victims of violence at work, postal workers are more fearful than employees in the national workforce about violence in the workplace:

- \* Postal employees are six times likelier to believe they are at greater risk than the average worker to be a victim of workplace violence from co-

workers (17 vs. 3 percent), despite similar rates of violence by coworkers.

- \* Postal employees are less likely to agree that their employer "takes action to protect employees against violence by non-employees" (52 vs. 70 percent), despite lower rates of violence by outsiders against postal employees.
- \* Postal employees are more likely to say they fear being robbed or attacked at work (13 vs. 8 percent).
- \* Postal workers are more likely to agree that "many managers and supervisors try to provoke employees to violence" (27 vs. 6 percent).
- \* Yet, postal employees are less likely than those in the national workforce to have seen someone carrying a gun or other weapon to work in the past year (3 vs. 8 percent).

### **Attitudes and Psychological Characteristics of Workers**

Postal workers are less angry, aggressive, hostile, depressed, and stressed than those in the national workforce, and they are better able to cope. However, postal workers have more negative attitudes about work, managers, and coworkers:

- \* Postal employees are twice as likely as those in the national workforce to say they would accept a job offer from a different employer with the same wages, retirement, and fringe benefits (46 vs. 23 percent). They are more likely than other government employees to say they would accept such an offer (46 vs. 28 percent).
- \* Postal employees are twice as likely as those in the national workforce to have negative attitudes about coworkers (31 vs. 14 percent).
- \* Postal employees are less likely than those in the national workforce to have positive attitudes about managers (58 vs. 79 percent).

### **"Going Postal"?**

If "going postal" is meant to suggest that postal employees are more violent than the national workforce, it is simply untrue:

- \* Postal employees are no more likely than those in the national workforce to physically assault, sexually harass, or verbally abuse their coworkers.
- \* Postal employees are less angry, aggressive, and hostile than those in the national workforce.

### **Substance Abuse and Workplace Violence**

Employees who observe substance abuse at work more often are more likely to be victims of physical assault, sexual harassment, and verbal abuse by coworkers. Employees in the national workforce who observe substance abuse in the workplace at least monthly are five times as likely to have been physically assaulted in the past year by a coworker as those who observe substance abuse less than monthly (11 vs. 2 percent). Among postal employees, the corresponding rates are similar (10 vs. 3 percent).

### **USPS Programs and Policies**

The Commission found that USPS has undertaken a comprehensive array of programs to reduce workplace violence. These programs have many strengths, but there is room for improvement in the execution of several of them.

The Commission has identified two major sources of friction: the enormous backlog of grievances and other disputes, and the dual compensation structure that rewards managers but not craft employees based on performance. USPS has a backlog of more than 126,000 grievances. More than 6,300 were arbitrated in fiscal 1999. By way of comparison, in the auto industry, virtually all grievances are resolved before they reach arbitration. In the entire auto industry—with about 400,000 bargaining unit employees—only eleven grievances reached arbitration in 1998. Furthermore, unlike postal craft (union) employees, United Auto Workers members (like their corporate managers) participate in employee profit-sharing plans.

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.









# 1. What Is the United States Postal Service?

Article I, Section 8, of the U.S. Constitution gives Congress the power "to establish post offices and post roads." In exercising this power, Congress established the United States Postal Service (USPS) to "bind the Nation together through the personal, educational, literary, and business correspondence of the people." (39 U.S.C. §101). Today, USPS delivers some 3.4 billion pieces of mail each week to every corner of our nation.

The mail is not monolithic. It is letters and packages; magazines and newspapers; books and compact discs; advertisements and catalogs; packages small enough to carry a bottle of pills and large enough to ship a bike; items of no value and expensive jewelry; holiday, birthday, and condolence cards; complaints filed in court to start a divorce or civil lawsuit; notices of default on a mortgage; and papers announcing an inheritance.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE POSTAL SERVICE

The Postal Service is organized into ten geographic areas (Chart 1), each headed by a vice president. Eighty-five performance clusters report to the areas. Each performance cluster includes about 10,000 employees. Within each performance cluster, a district manager and plant managers oversee operations and provide support services, such as human resources.

Prior to the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970, the Postmaster General was a member of the President's cabinet. With that act, the Postal Service became an independent establishment of the federal government. An eleven-member Board of Governors oversees the Postal Service. The President appoints nine members with the advice and consent of the Senate.

These members select the Postmaster General, who joins the Board of Governors. Together, they select the Deputy Postmaster General, who also joins the Board. A separate and independent five-member body appointed by the President with Senate confirmation, the Postal Rate Commission, sets postal rates.

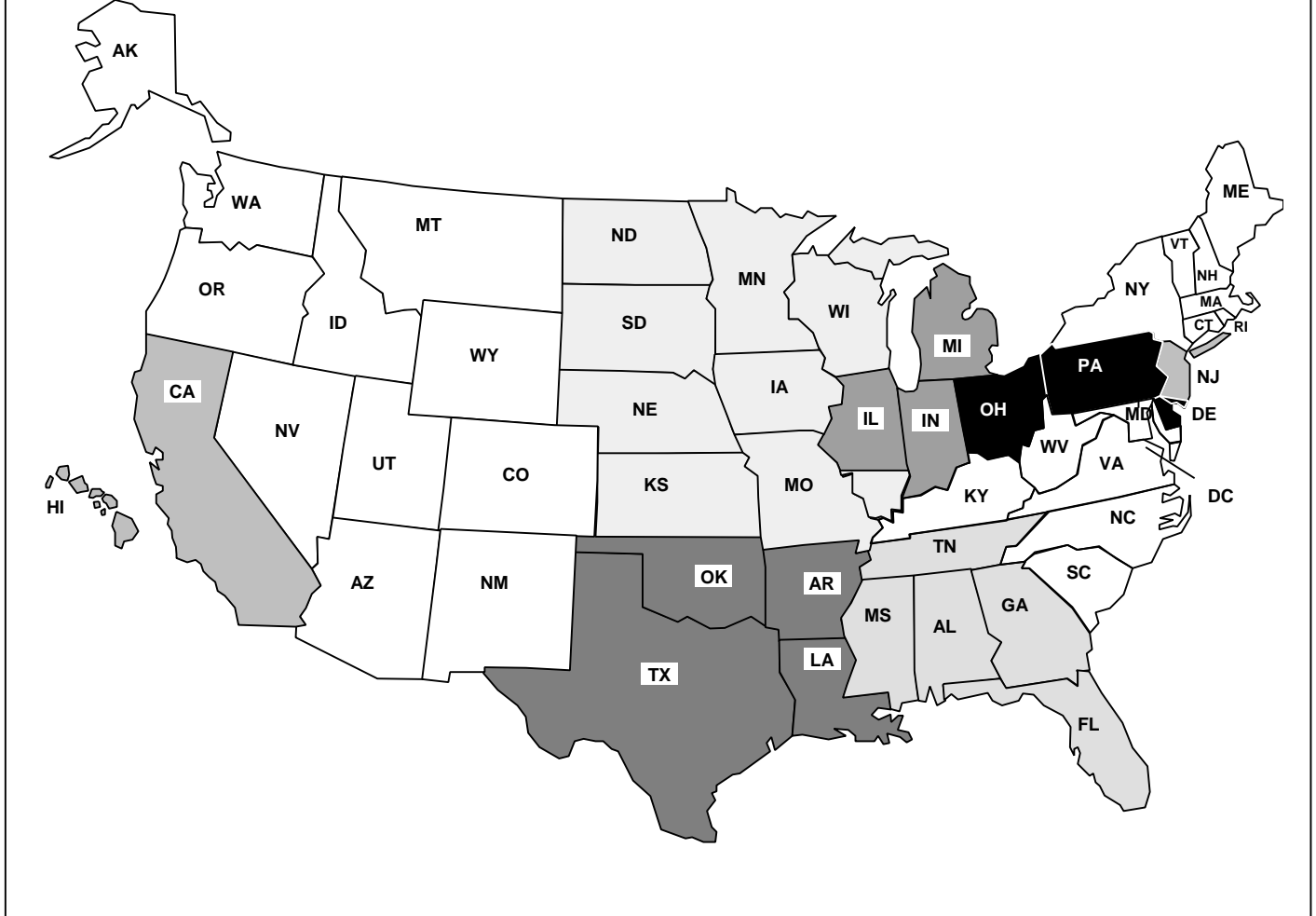
## POSTAL WORKFORCE

The Postal Service is the second largest civilian employer in the nation, after Wal-Mart. In fiscal 1999 there were more than 900,000 employees, including almost 800,000 career employees and more than 100,000 temporary, casual, substitute, and relief workers, called non-career employees.<sup>3</sup> Postal workers are federal employees.

Four major unions represent more than 700,000 career employees. They have the right to bargain over wages, hours, and working conditions, but, like other federal employees, postal workers do not have the right to strike. Binding arbitration resolves impasses in contract negotiations.

Employees represented by unions are known as craft employees. The largest postal union, the American Postal Workers Union (APWU), represents more than 344,000 window clerks, workers in processing and distribution facilities, and maintenance and motor vehicle employees. The National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) represents more than 240,000 city letter carriers; the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association (NRLCA) more than 55,000 career rural carriers and 57,000 substitute, associate, auxiliary, and relief carriers; the National Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU) more than 61,000 employees who move and process mail. Smaller unions represent nurses and postal police.

**Chart 1: U. S. Postal Service Areas**



The postal worker has many faces in many places, performing a diverse range of jobs in a variety of settings. Window clerks sell stamps and other products and handle other transactions with individual consumers. City and rural letter carriers typically spend a few hours in the morning at a post office sorting the mail for their route and then deliver mail on foot or by vehicle. City letter carriers are paid hourly and receive overtime pay. Rural carriers are paid an annual salary that (with limited exceptions) does not depend on how many hours they work on any given day. Mail handlers move and process mail, typically in large facilities. Processing and distribution clerks sort mail: they work in small or medium-sized post offices sorting mail by hand and in large, highly mechanized, often noisy processing and dis-

tribution facilities handling automated equipment. Some automated equipment can "read" the addresses on more than 40,000 pieces of mail an hour with a crew of only two people.

Some 85,000 non-craft employees may join three management associations: the National Association of Postmasters of the United States, National League of Postmasters of the United States, and National Association of Postal Supervisors. Managers may belong to more than one of these organizations, so membership overlaps. Though not unions, these associations are entitled by law to be consulted on pay and benefits. Non-craft employees include senior executives overseeing large service areas such as major cities, junior positions that operate post offices with a few employees or just one, supervisors

holding line positions overseeing craft employees, and other jobs ranging from facility managers to positions in marketing, accounting, human resources, labor relations, law, engineering, information technology, and other areas.

### **Characteristics of the Postal Workforce**

Compared with the national civilian labor force, postal employees are more likely to be male (63 vs. 54 percent); less likely to be White (65 vs. 78 percent); twice as likely to be Black (22 vs. 10 percent); about as likely to be Hispanic (7 vs. 8 percent); and more likely to be Asian or other races (7 vs. 3 percent).<sup>4</sup>

Compared with the national workforce, postal employees are more likely to be married (68 vs. 59 percent); less likely to be college graduates (21 vs. 37 percent); and more likely to be over age 44 (53 vs. 36 percent). Postal employees are less likely than the national workforce to work a day shift (68 vs. 82 percent).<sup>5</sup>

The postal workforce is remarkably stable. Postal employees are twice as likely as the national workforce to have worked for their employer for more than ten years (59 vs. 29 percent).<sup>6</sup>

### **Veterans' Preference**

Certain veterans, such as those who have served in combat, receive a preference in hiring for postal and other federal jobs. Preference-eligible veterans receive five or ten extra points on exams that determine eligibility and place in line for postal jobs. Postal employees are likelier than other federal employees to be veterans (35 vs. 27 percent) and to have veterans' preference (29 vs. 25 percent). Postal employees are more than twice as likely as the national workforce to be veterans (35 vs. 16 percent).<sup>7</sup>

## **COMPENSATION**

The law requires compensation and benefits for postal officers and employees to be comparable to the private sector, but caps compensation for any employee at the top of the Executive Schedule for federal workers:

It shall be the policy of the Postal Service to maintain compensation and benefits for all officers and employees on a standard of comparability to the compensation and benefits paid for comparable levels of work in the private sector of the economy. No officer or employee shall be paid compensation at a rate in excess of the rate for level I of the Executive Schedule under section 5312 of title 5 (39 U.S.C. §1003).

Level I of the Executive Schedule covers cabinet secretaries and a few other positions and is currently set at \$157,000. Today the Postmaster General earns \$157,000 and may not receive salary or bonus beyond that amount—a small percentage of "compensation and benefits paid for comparable levels of work in the private sector." In 1999, the chief executive officer of United Parcel Service earned \$1.5 million and the chief executive officer of Federal Express earned \$2.1 million just in salary and bonus, not including millions of dollars more in stock options, long-term compensation, and financial perquisites.<sup>8</sup>



## 2. Death in the Workplace

Postal employees committed two of the most tragic and highly publicized workplace homicides and suicides. In 1986, letter carrier Patrick Henry Sherrill killed 14 coworkers and himself at the Edmond, Oklahoma, Post Office. Five years later in 1991, letter carrier Thomas McIlvane killed four coworkers and himself at the Royal Oak, Michigan, Post Office. These and other homicides by postal employees have received massive media coverage and a special niche in public awareness.

Recently, however, highly visible homicides in other settings have heightened awareness of the extent to which violence plagues our nation, including schools, workplaces, homes, and communities. Since the Commission was established in October 1998,

- \* Two high school students killed 13 people and themselves at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado.

- \* A day trader killed 12 people and himself in Atlanta, Georgia.
- \* A Xerox employee killed seven coworkers in Honolulu, Hawaii.
- \* A hotel employee killed five people, including four coworkers, in Tampa, Florida.
- \* A man killed seven people and himself in a church in Fort Worth, Texas.
- \* Two men killed five employees at a Wendy's restaurant in New York City.

These widely reported incidents represent only a sliver of the problem. In 1998—the most recent year for which figures are available—there were 709 workplace homicides in America, four percent of the 16,910 homicides committed that year.<sup>9,10</sup> In 1998, homicide was the second leading cause of death at work, accounting for 12 percent of 6,026 occupational deaths. Highway crashes were the number one

### "Going Postal"

"Going postal" has become pejorative popular shorthand for employee violence. There is a movie called "Going Postal" and a computer game called "Postal." The American Dialect Society selected the phrase as a word of the year for 1995.<sup>11</sup> Journalists and comedians make liberal use of the phrase, and stereotypes of violent postal workers are common in ordinary conversation as well. A bumper sticker reads, "Guns don't kill people, postal workers do."<sup>12</sup> A 1999 *Washington Post* headline for a story on workplace violence read, "'Going Postal' Hits the Private Sector."<sup>13</sup> A column about electronic postage concluded, "One benefit is that it keeps you out of the post office. You never know what is going to happen in those places these days."<sup>14</sup> A St. Louis sportswriter facetiously proposed the "United States Post Office Employee Award" for a football player who attacked an official.<sup>15</sup>

The phrase has also begun a secondary life as a headline for postal news of any kind. Examples include, "Going Postal Over Latest Rate Increase,"<sup>16</sup> and "Truck Doors Go Postal; Mail Spills."<sup>17</sup> Numerous cheerful "going postal" headlines followed the Tour de France victories by the USPS-sponsored bicycle team.

Many postal employees have stories to tell of off-hand comments from strangers. Boarding an airplane while wearing a shirt with a USPS logo, a postal manager was greeted by one pilot saying to another "You need to watch her. She is one of those post office employees."<sup>18</sup> Postal employees do not think the jokes are funny. They resent the phrase and the image. Many feel the media focuses unfairly on the Postal Service. One rural carrier expressed a typical view: "We are vulnerable because we are such a large employer. It becomes a hot issue for the headlines, but there is no greater frequency here compared to the population." Some employees say they are embarrassed to tell people where they work because of the violent stereotype

cause, accounting for 24 percent. The next most common causes were contact with objects and equipment, falls, exposure to harmful substances or environments, and fires or explosions.

Like homicides generally, workplace homicides have been declining in recent years. Since the Department of Labor began collecting comprehensive data in 1992, the number held steady at about 1,050 per year (0.9 per 100,000 workers) through 1994, and has since fallen each year since 1995, reaching a seven-year low of 709 (0.5 per 100,000 workers) in 1998.<sup>19</sup>

## VICTIMS

Employees in certain occupations and industries are at greatest risk of workplace homicide. The relative rankings for the major occupation and industry groups are generally stable from year to year. In order to have enough postal incidents to allow meaningful analysis, we used data from 1992 through

1998, the period for which the Department of Labor has collected data. There were 6,719 workplace homicide deaths during this period, including 16 postal employees, 0.2 percent of the total.<sup>20</sup>

## By Industry

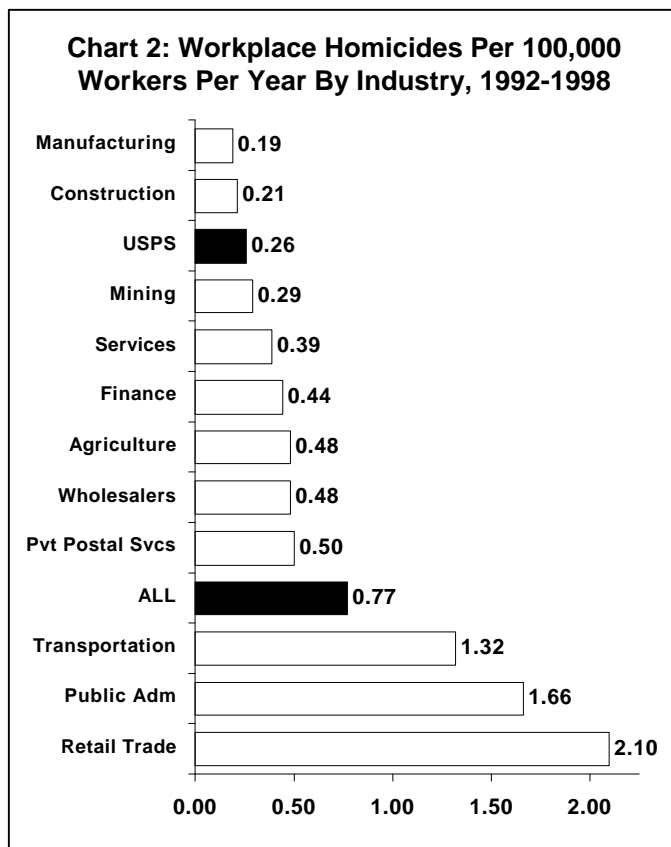
The rate of workplace homicide for workers in all major industries, as well as the USPS and private postal services, is shown in Chart 2.<sup>21</sup> Among major industries, retail trade (e.g., stores, restaurants, and gas stations) had the highest homicide rate, 2.10 per 100,000 workers. Public administration (including police) ranks next at 1.66 per 100,000, followed by transportation (including taxi and truck drivers) at 1.32 per 100,000. The rate for postal employees was 0.26 per 100,000 workers—one eighth that for retail trade, less than the rate for private postal services (0.50), and a third the national rate (0.77). Among major industries only manufacturing and construction had lower rates of workplace homicide than USPS.<sup>22</sup>

## By Occupation

Among occupations, taxi drivers and chauffeurs had the highest rate of workplace homicide (31.54 per 100,000). Police and detectives rank a distant second (6.46 per 100,000), followed by private guards and police (6.26), and retail workers (2.10). USPS letter carriers and clerks are identified as distinct occupations in national data and rank relatively low, at 0.21 and 0.19 per 100,000. Taxi drivers were more than 150 times likelier than letter carriers or clerks to be victims of homicide at work. Private messengers had a rate of 1.00 per 100,000, five times that of USPS carriers. Private mail clerks had no workplace homicides during the period measured.<sup>23</sup>

## Demographic Groups

The risk of being a victim of workplace homicide varies with gender, age, and race. Men are more than three times likelier than women to be victims of workplace homicide (1.15 vs. 0.32 per 100,000 workers). The rate of workplace homicide generally rises with the victim's age and is markedly higher for workers 65 and over (1.62 per 100,000). Blacks are





twice as likely as Whites to be victims of workplace homicide (1.34 vs. 0.59 per 100,000 workers).<sup>24</sup>

## PERPETRATORS

It is impossible to compare with any precision the likelihood of a postal employee being killed by a coworker or a non-coworker with that of an employee in the national workforce. We know that from 1992 through 1998, nine of the 16 postal victims were killed by current or former coworkers. Unfortunately, we cannot identify the perpetrator's status in nearly half (46 percent) of all workplace homicides.<sup>25</sup> Unsolved crimes likely explain much of the missing information (31 percent of all murders in 1998 were unsolved<sup>26</sup>), while some may be due to limitations of national data collection procedures.<sup>27</sup>

## WORKPLACE SUICIDES

Workplace suicide rates are highest for workers in agriculture and public administration. Rates in other industries are half these rates or less. Eight major industries and private postal services have suicide rates higher than USPS, but the USPS rate (0.13 per 100,000 workers) is only slightly lower than the national rate (0.17) (Chart 3).

## A DETAILED LOOK AT HOMICIDES INVOLVING USPS EMPLOYEES

The Commission examined records of every known workplace homicide from 1986 to 1999 that involved postal employees either as victims or perpetrators.<sup>28</sup> Nineteen eighty-six was the year of the landmark incident in which a postal employee in Edmond, Oklahoma, killed 14 coworkers and himself. We reviewed the circumstances of each incident, characteristics of perpetrators and victims, warning signs, and the USPS response. Detailed descriptions of each incident are included in Appendix B.

From 1986 to 1999, 29 workplace homicide incidents involved postal employees as either victims or perpetrators. There were 54 homicide victims in these incidents, including 48 postal employees.

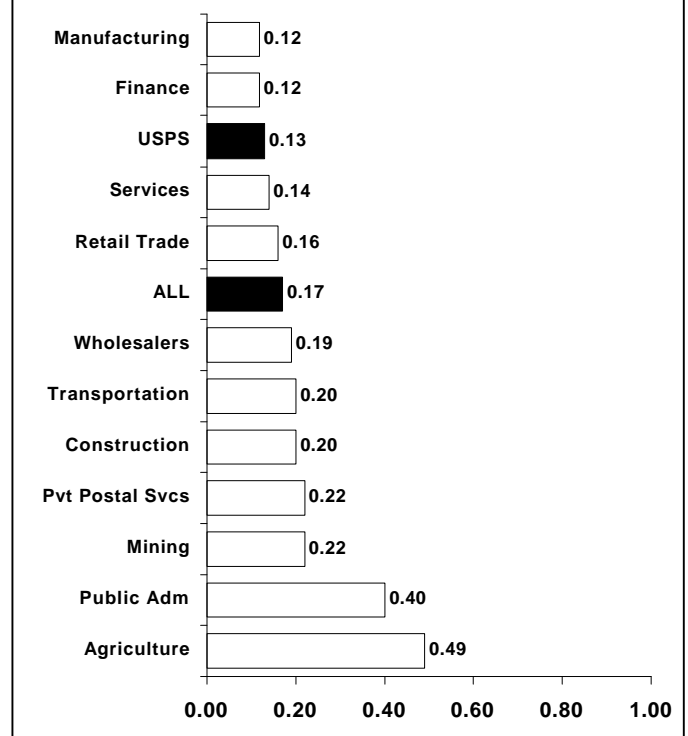
Fourteen of these postal employees were killed in the Edmond, Oklahoma, incident in 1986. Current or former postal employees killed 34 of the 48 postal victims. Twenty-five of these 34 postal victims were killed in just five incidents. More than two dozen individuals, most of them postal employees, were injured in the 29 incidents.

## Homicides by Non-Employees

Non-employees were responsible for 14 of the postal worker homicides (Chart 4). Two homicides involved more than one perpetrator. Major findings about these homicides include:

- \* **Motives.** Motives were varied. Six of these incidents involved robberies; others involved a dispute over a debt, anger over mail not delivered when expected, and intimate relationships.
- \* **Methods.** Guns were used in eleven incidents, or 80 percent. Knives were used in two incidents, and one victim was strangled.

**Chart 3: Workplace Suicides Per 100,000 Workers Per Year By Industry, 1992-1998**



**Chart 4: Workplace Homicides of Postal Employees by Non-Employees, 1986-1999**

| Location        | Date      | No. of Perpetrators | No. of Victims | No. of Postal Victims | Motive       | Method        | Suicide by Perpetrator | Known Substance Abuse | Postal Victim Job Type |
|-----------------|-----------|---------------------|----------------|-----------------------|--------------|---------------|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Chatsworth, CA  | 8/10/99   | 1                   | 1              | 1                     | Hate         | Firearm       | No                     | Yes                   | City Carrier           |
| Ruby, AK        | 6/20/96   | 1                   | 1              | 1                     | Robbery      | Firearm       | No                     | No                    | Postmaster             |
| Washington, DC  | 6/11/96   | 3                   | 1              | 1                     | Robbery      | Firearm       | No                     | No                    | City Carrier           |
| Hartford, CT    | 1/30/96   | 1                   | 1              | 1                     | Mail-Related | Firearm       | No                     | Yes                   | City Carrier           |
| Miami, FL       | 8/5/94    | 1                   | 1              | 1                     | Personal     | Firearm       | No                     | Yes                   | City Carrier           |
| Bronx, NY       | 1/21/93   | 6                   | 1              | 1                     | Robbery      | Firearm       | No                     | Yes(6)                | Motor Vehicle Operator |
| Crockett, VA    | 9/18/92   | 1                   | 1              | 1                     | Robbery      | Knife         | No                     | Yes                   | Postmaster             |
| Paulina, LA     | 4/23/92   | 1                   | 1              | 1                     | Robbery      | Firearm       | No                     | Yes                   | Postmaster             |
| Andover, MA     | 11/7/91   | 1                   | 1              | 1                     | Personal     | Firearm       | Yes                    | No                    | City Carrier           |
| Dayton, AL      | 5/24/91   | 1                   | 1              | 1                     | Robbery      | Knife         | No                     | Yes                   | Postmaster             |
| Gainesboro, TN  | 2/27/90   | 1                   | 1              | 1                     | Unknown      | Firearm       | No                     | Yes                   | Rural Carrier          |
| Miami, FL       | 9/26/89   | 1                   | 1              | 1                     | Personal     | Firearm       | Yes                    | No                    | City Carrier           |
| Pinetta, FL     | 6/20/88   | 1                   | 1              | 1                     | Unknown      | Strangulation | No                     | No                    | Rural Carrier Relief   |
| Los Angeles, CA | 4/26/86   | 1                   | 1              | 1                     | Unknown      | Firearm       | No                     | Yes                   | City Carrier           |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>14</b> | <b>21</b>           | <b>14</b>      | <b>14</b>             |              |               | <b>2</b>               | <b>14</b>             |                        |

- \* **Perpetrators.** Two thirds of the perpetrators (14 of 21) were known to have histories of substance abuse or to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of the homicide. Fifteen had criminal histories and 13 had histories of prior violence. Three had histories of domestic violence. Four had mental health problems. These troubled histories are consistent with research on the predictors of violence (see box). Twenty of the 21 perpetrators were men. Two committed suicide.
- \* **Victims.** All of the postal workers who were killed held jobs exposing them to the public, with few or no coworkers nearby. The 14 victims included seven city letter carriers, two rural carriers, four small-town postmasters, and one motor vehicle operator. There were no significant differences between these victims and the postal workforce in gender, race, or ethnicity (see Appendix B, Chart B.1).

### Summaries of Homicides by Non-Employees

**Chatsworth, California, August 10, 1999.**<sup>29</sup> Buford O. Furrow has been charged with shooting and

killing Joseph Santos Iletto, a part-time letter carrier, on his delivery route. Furrow reportedly said that he killed Iletto because Iletto was not White and was a federal government employee. Furrow killed Iletto approximately one hour after firing rounds into a Jewish community center, wounding five people. At the time of the homicide, Furrow was on probation after serving five months in prison for threatening staff members at a psychiatric hospital where he had sought treatment, saying he felt homicidal. Furrow is reported to abuse alcohol. Furrow has been charged with five counts of attempted murder, one count of murdering a federal employee, carjacking, and illegal possession of a firearm while on probation from a previous conviction. Furrow awaits trial.

**Ruby, Alaska, June 20, 1996.** Abram Paul Walter robbed and killed Postmaster Agnes Marie Wright in the Ruby, Alaska, Post Office. He beat and shot her. Walter was a suspect in a number of robberies of Alaskan post offices, and confessed to killing Wright during an interview with postal inspectors about a different post office robbery. He is also believed to be responsible for numerous other burglaries in Alaska. Walter was arrested once for shop-

lifting, and the charge was dismissed. He was convicted of robbing and killing Postmaster Wright.

**Washington, D.C., June 11, 1996.** Three juveniles robbed and killed letter carrier Mun Hon Kim on his delivery route. Two youths approached Kim sitting in his postal vehicle as he spoke with a postal customer. They ordered Kim and his customer to get on the ground. As Kim was leaving the vehicle, one of the youths shot him. Three youths—the shooter, the lookout, and the getaway driver—were convicted of robbing and killing Kim.

**Hartford, Connecticut, January 30, 1996.** Garfield Joseph Patterson shot and killed letter carrier Robert A. Budusky on his delivery route. Patterson shot the letter carrier because he was angry that a check he was expecting had not been delivered. Patterson had a history of mental illness and had once been arrested for threatening his sister with a knife. Before his trial, he was diagnosed with schizophrenia and "psychotic disorder not otherwise specified." Patterson had a history of heavy marijuana use. He was convicted of killing Budusky.

**Miami, Florida, August 5, 1994.** Jerrie MacDonald-Baist shot and killed her ex-husband, letter carrier Barry Baist. The perpetrator and the victim had recently been divorced. MacDonald-Baist had a history of substance abuse. She was convicted of killing Barry Baist.

**Bronx, New York, January 21, 1993.** Alfredo Gallego shot and killed motor vehicle operator Gui-

llermo Gonzalez during an armed robbery. Five other people participated in the crime, driving vehicles or providing equipment. One was a postal employee; another was on the USPS rolls pending removal. The victim had observed suspicious individuals near stations on his run shortly before his homicide. He reported these observations to the Postal Police. The Postal Police patrol unit escorted the victim on his pickups on several occasions following these reports, but they observed no suspicious activity, and did not escort him on the day of the homicide. All perpetrators admitted to regular marijuana and cocaine use. Two had been drinking before the incident. One had a history of domestic violence; another, of armed robbery; a third, of armed assault. Three had been involved in previous robberies. Alfredo Gallego and one other participant were convicted of robbing and killing Gonzalez. Another participant was convicted of conspiring to kill Gonzalez. One was convicted of perjury. The two postal employees were convicted of robbery and related charges.

**Crockett, Virginia, September 18, 1992.** Jimmy Lawrence Nance killed Postmaster Donna Stevenson at the Crockett, Virginia, Post Office by slashing her throat. According to the investigation, the motive for the homicide was robbery of Stevenson's personal assets. No Postal Service property or money was taken during the incident. Nance had a criminal record involving substance abuse. He was convicted of the homicide and robbery of Postmaster Steven-

## Predictors of Violence

The mentally ill, alcohol and drug abusers, and individuals with a history of violence are likelier to be violent. Although most mentally ill individuals are not violent, individuals suffering mental illness have been found five to six times more likely than those with no diagnosis to engage in violent acts in the past year (11 to 13 percent vs. 2 percent). Individuals diagnosed with alcohol abuse or dependence are 12 times more likely than people with no diagnosis to commit violent acts in the past year (25 vs. 2 percent); individuals diagnosed with cannabis abuse or dependence are nine times more likely to commit violence (19 vs. 2 percent), and those diagnosed with other drug abuse or dependence (such as that involving cocaine) are 17 times more likely to commit violence (35 vs. 2 percent).<sup>30</sup>

A past of non-violence can be an important predictor of future conduct. One longitudinal study found that an individual who had not committed serious violence before age 20 was unlikely ever to commit serious violence.<sup>31</sup>

son.

**Paulina, Louisiana, April 23, 1992.** Kenneth Wayne Jackson robbed, shot, and killed Postmaster Aljorie Clark Goodman in the Paulina, Louisiana, Post Office, taking cash and USPS money orders. Jackson had a history of violent felonies and had been released from prison three months earlier after serving 17 years for armed robbery. Jackson used marijuana. During his trial, a witness whom Jackson dated testified that he had raped her at gunpoint. Jackson was convicted of killing Postmaster Goodman.

**Andover, Massachusetts, November 7, 1991.** James Nelson shot and killed letter carrier David Bradner on his delivery route. The motive for the shooting was related to money that Bradner owed Nelson for carpentry work. Approximately two weeks before the shooting, Nelson went to Bradner's house demanding payment for his work. The two fought when Bradner refused to pay. On the day of the shooting, Nelson hid and waited for Bradner to make his regular delivery. According to witnesses, he shot Bradner and fled the scene. Several days after the shooting, a hunter found Nelson's dead body in his car. The police concluded that Nelson shot himself. No suicide note was found.

**Dayton, Alabama, May 24, 1991.** Jerry Lee Dansby robbed and attacked Postmaster Olive Prowell of the Dayton, Alabama, Post Office. A postal carrier found Prowell with her throat slashed. Prowell was taken to a local hospital, where she died. Dansby had a criminal history, and had been released from prison three months earlier. He admitted using alcohol and marijuana. Dansby was convicted of robbing and killing the postmaster.

**Gainesboro, Tennessee, February 27, 1990.** James Blaske shot and killed rural carrier Roy Wayne Grimes on his delivery route. The police never found a motive for the shooting. The investigation revealed that Blaske had planned to shoot the telephone man the previous day. Blaske's criminal history included arrests for conspiracy and threats against the President of the United States. Blaske was found not

guilty by reason of insanity and was committed to the custody of the U.S. Attorney General.

**Miami, Florida, September 26, 1989.** Lucious Delagel shot and killed his ex-girlfriend, letter carrier Regina Washington, in the parking lot of the South Miami Post Office. After killing Washington, Delagel shot and killed himself. According to the investigation, the shooting was related to the personal relationship between Delagel and Washington. Shortly before the shooting, Delagel threatened to kill Washington, and severely beat Washington's friend, who was also a postal employee. Delagel was in and out of juvenile prisons as a youth.

**Pinetta, Florida, June 20, 1988.** Joe Williams killed rural carrier relief Immogene Rogers by strangulation while she was on her delivery route. Inspectors speculated that robbery was the motive for the killing, although nothing appeared missing from the mail truck or from Rogers' personal items. Williams was convicted of killing Rogers.

**Los Angeles, California, April 26, 1986.** Kerry Lynn Brown shot and killed letter carrier Dale J. Hooker while she was delivering mail on the porch of the home of Brown's parents. There was no apparent motive for the shooting. Brown recently had been very depressed and tried to kill himself. Brown had an extensive criminal history and was a known substance abuser. Brown was convicted of killing Hooker.

## **Homicides by Current or Former Postal Employees**

There were 15 homicide incidents by current or former employees from 1986 to 1999 (Chart 5). Thirty-four postal employees and six other individuals were killed in these incidents. Five incidents accounted for the killing of 25 postal employees and four others. Major findings about these homicides include:

- \* **Motives.** Motives were varied. One incident was related to robbery. Six cases were primarily related to personal matters, such as actual and desired intimate relationships. Four cases were primarily related to workplace issues; in two of

these, the killings followed an arbitration decision upholding the perpetrator's termination. Three cases were related to both personal and workplace issues. In one case, the motive was unknown.

- \* **Methods.** Guns were used in all 15 incidents.
- \* **Perpetrators.** Fourteen of 15 perpetrators had troubled histories, including substance use, past violence, mental health problems, and/or criminal histories. Seven exhibited more than one of these characteristics. Six either had a history of substance abuse or were using substances at the time of the incident. Seven perpetrators committed suicide. At least five perpetrators exhibited behavior before their employment that should have prevented them from being hired.

Fourteen of 15 offenders were men. There were no significant differences between the employee

perpetrators and the postal workforce in race, ethnicity, or job type (see Appendix B, Chart B.1).

- \* **Victims.** Postal victims had a range of jobs. Nine victims were managers, and managers were significantly more likely than the average of all postal workers to be victims (0.8 vs. 0.3 per 100,000 workers). No other job types were significantly more likely to be victims. Thirteen victims were clerks; five, city carriers; four, rural carriers; two, mail handlers; one, a mechanic. There were no significant differences between the victims and the postal workforce in race, ethnicity, or gender (See Appendix B, Chart B.1).
- \* **Warning Signs.** In some cases, warning signs such as threats were taken seriously, and some homicides occurred despite numerous precautions. On the other hand, in several cases man-

**Chart 5: Workplace Homicides by Current or Former Postal Employees, 1986-1999**

| Location             | Date      | No. of Perpetrators | No. of Victims | No. of Postal Victims | Motive         | Method            | Suicide by Perpetrator | Known Substance Abuse | Postal Victim Job Type  | Perpetrator Job Type |
|----------------------|-----------|---------------------|----------------|-----------------------|----------------|-------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|---|----------------------|
| Dallas, TX           | 4/17/98   | 1                   | 1              | 1                     | Personal       | Firearm           | No                     | No                    | Clerk   | Transitional Carrier |
| Milwaukee, WI        | 12/19/97  | 1                   | 1              | 1                     | Personal/ Work | Firearm           | Yes                    | Yes                   | Clerk   | Clerk                |
| Miami Beach, FL      | 9/2/97    | 1                   | 1              | 0                     | Personal       | Firearm           | Yes                    | No                    | N/A   | Clerk                |
| Las Vegas, NV        | 12/19/96  | 1                   | 1              | 1                     | Work           | Firearm           | No                     | Yes                   | Labor Relations Specialist                                      | Mail Handler         |
| City of Industry, CA | 7/9/95    | 1                   | 1              | 1                     | Unknown        | Firearm           | No                     | No                    | Supervisor  | Clerk                |
| Montclair, NJ        | 3/21/95   | 1                   | 4              | 2                     | Robbery        | Firearm           | No                     | Yes                   | 2 Clerks  | Casual Clerk         |
| Cedar Rapids, IA     | 1/14/94   | 1                   | 1              | 1                     | Personal       | Firearm           | No                     | No                    | City Carrier  | City Carrier         |
| Dana Point, CA       | 5/6/93    | 1                   | 2              | 1                     | Personal/ Work | Firearm and Knife | No                     | Yes                   | City Carrier  | City Carrier         |
| Dearborn, MI         | 5/6/93    | 1                   | 1              | 1                     | Work           | Firearm           | Yes                    | No                    | Mechanic  | Vehicle Maintenance  |
| Royal Oak, MI        | 11/14/91  | 1                   | 4              | 4                     | Work           | Firearm           | Yes                    | Yes                   | 4 Managers  | City Carrier         |
| Ridgewood, NJ        | 10/10/91  | 1                   | 4              | 3                     | Personal/ Work | Firearm and Sword | No                     | No                    | 1 Supervisor<br>2 Mailhandlers                                  | Clerk                |
| Atlanta, GA          | 9/17/89   | 1                   | 1              | 1                     | Personal       | Firearm           | No                     | No                    | Clerk   | Clerk                |
| Escondido, CA        | 8/10/89   | 1                   | 3              | 2                     | Personal       | Firearm           | Yes                    | No                    | 2 City Carriers   | City Carrier         |
| Chelsea, MA          | 6/29/88   | 1                   | 1              | 1                     | Personal       | Firearm           | Yes                    | Yes                   | Clerk   | Clerk                |
| Edmond, OK           | 8/20/86   | 1                   | 14             | 14                    | Work           | Firearm           | Yes                    | No                    | 7 Clerks<br>1 City Carrier<br>4 Rural Carriers<br>2 Supervisors | City Carrier         |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>15</b> | <b>15</b>           | <b>40</b>      | <b>34</b>             |                |                   | <b>7</b>               | <b>6</b>              |   |                      |

agers, coworkers, union officials, physicians, or counselors misread such signs or mistakenly assessed perpetrators as unlikely to commit violence.

## **Summaries of Homicides by Current or Former Employees**

**Dallas, Texas, April 17, 1998.** Letter carrier Maceo Yarbough returned from his route, entered the lunchroom of Northhaven Station, and shot box clerk Lavinia Kelly Shaw. Yarbough killed Shaw because he feared that she was planning to kill him and his family. Yarbough thought that Shaw directed her boyfriend and postal inspectors to follow him. An evaluation before trial found that Yarbough was paranoid schizophrenic and probably had been for years. Found mentally incompetent to stand trial, he was committed to the maximum security unit at the state mental hospital.

**Milwaukee, Wisconsin, December 19, 1997.** Postal clerk Anthony James Deculit shot and killed postal clerk Russell Daniel Smith and wounded his supervisor and another employee. Some of Deculit's coworkers believe that the shootings may have resulted from Deculit's frustration toward his supervisor as well as a love interest Deculit had in a coworker. Sixteen months before the shootings, Deculit told his therapist that he was under a lot of stress and if it continued he would kill his supervisor and station manager. He also told her that he had a gun. The therapist told the USPS threat assessment team that she did not feel the threat signaled imminent action. Nevertheless, the team sent Deculit for an emergency mental health exam. The examining physician concluded that Deculit did not pose an acute danger and was fit for duty. Deculit took Prozac and smoked marijuana. He killed himself after shooting his coworkers.

**Miami Beach, Florida, September 2, 1997.**<sup>32</sup> Jesus Antonio Tamayo, a postal clerk, shot his ex-wife and her friend, Mirna Mendoza, while they were standing in line at the Miami Beach Post Office. His ex-wife survived, but Mendoza died four months after the shooting from complications related to the gun-

shot wound. Tamayo and his ex-wife had been divorced four years before the shooting. He had previously been accused of stalking, criminal mischief, and mail-tampering. After shooting the two women, Tamayo went into the parking lot and shot and killed himself.

**Las Vegas, Nevada, December 19, 1996.** Former mail handler Charles Edward Jennings shot and killed labor relations specialist James C. Brown in the parking lot of the Las Vegas Post Office shortly after an arbitration decision upholding his termination from USPS. During his tenure at the Postal Service, Jennings was recognized several times for excellent performance, yet he also amassed a number of suspensions and letters of warning. He was ultimately fired for falsification of records and fraud. Before the homicide, he threatened to kill specific people if his termination was upheld at arbitration. These threats were never reported to postal or other authorities. Jennings was on cocaine at the time of the incident and had a long history of substance abuse. He confessed and was convicted of killing Brown. In May 2000, the Nevada Supreme Court overturned the conviction on procedural grounds and returned the case to district court.

**City of Industry, California, July 9, 1995.** Distribution clerk Bruce William Clark shot and killed postal supervisor James Whooper III at the City of Industry Processing and Distribution Center. The motive is unclear. Clark's 25-year tenure with the Postal Service was unremarkable. His criminal history reflected a drunk driving arrest 22 years before the shooting. Clark was convicted of killing Whooper.

**Montclair, New Jersey, March 21, 1995.** Former postal employee Christopher Thomas Green robbed the Montclair Post Office at gunpoint, then shot two clerks and three customers. One customer survived; the other four victims died. Although Green knew both employee victims, there was no evidence that he had a dispute with either of them. The motive for the shooting was robbery. Green confessed to the homicides and to robbery of \$5,729.38. Green was a

cocaine abuser. He was convicted of robbing and killing the postal workers and customers.

**Cedar Rapids, Iowa, January 14, 1994.** Former letter carrier Ronald Wendell Downs, Sr., ambushed letter carrier Gloria Heising while she delivered her route. He shot her repeatedly, killing her. Downs was Heising's former boyfriend and had been fired from the Postal Service for repeatedly threatening to kill her. Years before the homicide, Downs was arrested for threatening Heising with a pistol and received a suspended sentence. Postal managers offered Heising a transfer to a postal position outside Iowa, but she declined. Downs confessed to police that he killed Heising because she ruined his life and caused him to lose his job. Downs was convicted of killing Heising.

**Dana Point, California, May 6, 1993.** Mark Hilbun, a former letter carrier, killed his mother and letter carrier Thomas Barbagallo, and wounded a letter carrier and four people who were not postal employees. The incidents occurred on and off postal property. The motive for the killings was related to a love interest that Hilbun had in a female coworker. During Hilbun's five years of employment with the Postal Service, he had received several letters of warning, a mental health fitness-for-duty examination, and was placed on emergency non-duty status for his continual harassment of a coworker and falsifying his employment application. In 1992, Hilbun was arrested once for drunk driving and a second time for continuing to harass his coworker. Hilbun had a long history of alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine abuse and never received treatment for his drug problems. While at the Postal Service, Hilbun was diagnosed with substance abuse disorder and bipolar disorder. Hilbun was convicted of killing his mother and his coworker.

**Dearborn, Michigan, May 6, 1993.** Postal employee Lawrence Jasion shot and killed postal mechanic Gary Montes and wounded two other postal employees. Jasion worked for the Postal Service off and on for 27 years in a variety of positions. The transfer of a friend and disagreement over radio music the day before the shooting upset Jasion and ap-

parently motivated him to shoot Montes. It is believed that he shot the two other employees because he believed he deserved a position one of them had received. Jasion had made a number of threats dating back to 1986. A few months before the killing, he denied any intention to act violently. During his employment with the Postal Service, Jasion had received several letters of warning and had been suspended. He committed suicide after killing the mechanic.

**Royal Oak, Michigan, November 14, 1991.** The day after an arbitrator upheld his firing from the Postal Service, former letter carrier Thomas McIlvane shot and killed four postal employees and injured four others. He then killed himself. McIlvane had a long history of threatening and verbally abusing his coworkers, supervisors, and customers. He was suspended several times for poor performance and threats, and was eventually fired for profane threats and insubordination. While awaiting the arbitration decision on his firing, McIlvane continued to threaten his supervisors and said repeatedly that he would kill people in the Royal Oak Post Office if he lost his arbitration.

While in the Marine Corps, before joining the Postal Service, McIlvane was convicted by court-martial of using disrespectful language to an officer and disobeying orders, and sentenced to three months' incarceration. Two years later, he was disciplined for driving an M-60 tank over an automobile. McIlvane's discharge was "general under honorable conditions" and he was barred from reenlistment. McIlvane had a history of substance abuse, and while working in the Postal Service he received employee assistance program counseling for drug and alcohol abuse. A fitness-for-duty examination determined that he had borderline personality disorder. McIlvane's criminal history reflects that he was arrested for threatening several of his supervisors, but he was tried and acquitted of those charges.

**Ridgewood, New Jersey, October 10, 1991.** Joseph M. Harris, a former Ridgewood, New Jersey, USPS clerk, shot and killed his former supervisor, two mail handlers, and a person who was not a

USPS employee. The killings occurred on and off postal property. During his eight years at the Postal Service, Harris received warning letters, was suspended, and was eventually terminated from the Postal Service in May, 1990, after he refused to submit to a fitness-for-duty examination. The homicides occurred more than a year after Harris's removal from the Postal Service. Harris was convicted of the killings. After the incident, the police noted similarities of the case to an unsolved, non-postal case from 1988. Harris was convicted of homicide and sexual assault in the earlier case.

**Atlanta, Georgia, September 17, 1989.** Joyce Davenport, a postal distribution clerk, shot and killed postal transfer clerk Tim McCoy. The motive was related to a personal relationship between Davenport and McCoy. Davenport was convicted of killing McCoy.

**Escondido, California, August 10, 1989.** John Merlin Taylor, a letter carrier, shot and killed his wife and two postal carriers, Richard Berni and Ronald Williams, and wounded a USPS clerk. According to the investigation, Taylor believed that postal management was out to get him and that his wife was conspiring with his coworkers to get him fired. Taylor killed himself after shooting the others.

**Chelsea, Massachusetts, June 29, 1988.** Postal clerk Domenic Lupoli shot and killed postal clerk Lisa M. Bruni at a postal facility. The day before the shooting, Bruni gave her supervisor a letter alleging that Lupoli was harassing and threatening her. A manager planned to meet with Bruni and Lupoli the next day, but the shooting occurred first. Lupoli was under the influence of alcohol at the time of the incident. A criminal record check disclosed that, in 1977, Lupoli was convicted of unlawful possession of a firearm and was sentenced to one year's probation. Lupoli had also harassed and threatened two former coworkers. He committed suicide about two hours after shooting Bruni.

**Edmond, Oklahoma, August 20, 1986.** Letter carrier Patrick Henry Sherrill shot and killed 14 coworkers and wounded six other postal employees at the Edmond Post Office. During his tenure with the

Postal Service, Sherrill was considered a poor employee and was formally disciplined. He was hired despite a poor federal employment history, including a supervisor's assessment of poor attitude and performance and allegations of making sexual innuendoes. While in the military, Sherrill pointed a loaded gun at his supervisor. Apparently, USPS management in Oklahoma City did not check job and personal references that would have excluded Sherrill from employment. Sherrill told friends and coworkers that he was unhappy with treatment by his supervisors and made vague threats that he would harm people at work. These threats were not reported to Postal Service management. Sherrill killed himself after shooting his coworkers.

## Lessons

**Inadequate Pre-Employment Screening.** At least five of the employee perpetrators exhibited prior behavior that should have prevented them from being hired:

- \* In Chelsea, Massachusetts, the perpetrator did not disclose a conviction for unlawful possession of a firearm on his application. This conviction was discovered through a criminal record check after the homicide. The homicide investigation also revealed that he had threatened coworkers at a previous job.
- \* In Dana Point, California, the perpetrator had discrepancies on his postal employment application concerning his arrest record and medical history (the investigative record does not specify what discrepancies). These were not discovered until four years after he was hired.
- \* In Royal Oak, Michigan, the perpetrator was disciplined, demoted, and court-martialed for a number of incidents while he served in the Marine Corps, including disobedience of lawful orders and driving a tank over an automobile. His USPS employment application stated only that he had been court-martialed and convicted for disrespecting a superior officer.



- \* In Edmond, Oklahoma, the perpetrator had an unsatisfactory prior federal employment history, including a supervisor's assessment of poor attitude and performance and allegations of making sexual innuendoes. He had also pointed a loaded weapon at a supervisor while in the Marine Corps, although he was discharged honorably. The second time USPS hired him, Sherrill was initially rejected because of his poor employment history, only to be offered employment after the hiring supervisor decided not to pass him over because he had veterans' preference.
- \* In Ridgewood, New Jersey, the perpetrator had a military career that included discipline for disobedience and disrespectful behavior. He was discharged "under honorable conditions," a discharge less favorable than an honorable discharge and a signal of problems in his military record.

**Inconsistent Response to Warning Signs.** The incidents involving employee perpetrators reveal a broad range of reactions to warning signs. In some cases, threats were taken seriously, and homicides occurred despite precautions. Three perpetrators had been fired for threatening behavior. On the other hand, in several cases managers, coworkers, union officials, physicians, or counselors mistakenly assessed the perpetrators as unlikely to commit violence. In at least two cases, managers did not report threats to the Inspection Service.

- \* In Chelsea, Massachusetts, the perpetrator had repeatedly harassed the victim, who asked management and her union for help. The day before the shooting, the victim notified managers about the perpetrator's threats. A manager planned to discuss the matter with the parties the following day, but the homicide occurred first.
- \* In Escondido, California, a local union official in whom the perpetrator had confided felt he was paranoid but not dangerous.
- \* In Ridgewood, New Jersey, the perpetrator had threatened his supervisor and postmaster and was fired when he refused to submit to a mental health examination.
- \* In Royal Oak, Michigan, the perpetrator had repeatedly threatened supervisors while on the job and while awaiting arbitration of the grievance he had filed disputing his dismissal.
- \* In Dana Point, California, the perpetrator was found unfit in a mental health fitness-for-duty examination, placed in emergency non-duty status, and removed from the Postal Service. At one point, he was committed for observation in a local psychiatric hospital and arrested for harassing a postal employee. About a month before the killings, when the harassment resumed, this employee was placed on administrative leave for her safety, and the postmaster instructed employees to secure the facility. On the day of the killings, the harassed employee was at the facility picking up her last paycheck before transferring to another facility for her safety. She successfully hid from the perpetrator.
- \* In Dearborn, Michigan, the perpetrator was twice referred to the Employee Assistance Program. A fellow employee wrote the postmaster that the perpetrator was "a time bomb waiting to go off." When a manager met with the perpetrator to discuss his coworkers' concerns, the perpetrator denied any violent intentions. Another manager believed there was insufficient basis to request a fitness-for-duty examination.
- \* In Cedar Rapids, Iowa, the perpetrator was dismissed for threatening to kill his former girlfriend, which he eventually did. His girlfriend had declined an offer from postal management to transfer out of state.
- \* In Las Vegas, Nevada, the perpetrator's wife told his coworker that the perpetrator threatened to kill himself if arbitration upheld his termination. After the arbitration decision upheld his termination, a union official told management that the perpetrator was in a rage. Managers—including a labor relations manager who was later killed—discussed notifying the Inspection

killed—discussed notifying the Inspection Service but did not do so.

- \* In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the perpetrator was sent for an emergency mental health examination, which found he did not pose an acute danger and was fit for duty.

## **Veterans**

The Commission finds that veterans are no more likely than non-veteran male employees to be perpetrators in homicide cases. Ninety-three percent of the employee perpetrators and 93 percent of the veterans in the postal workforce are male. Seventy-one percent of male perpetrators (10 of 14) and 56 percent of the male postal workforce were veterans. The 15 percentage point difference is not statistically significant, because of the small number of perpetrators (*e.g.*, if the number of perpetrators who were veterans were reduced by one, the percentage would be 64 percent; if reduced by two, it would drop to 57 percent).<sup>33</sup>

## **Guns, Drugs, and Alcohol**

Guns, drugs, and alcohol had a pervasive presence both in homicides by employees and in homicides by non-employees.

- \* Guns were used in all the homicides by current or former postal employees and 90 percent of the homicides by non-employees. They were used in all the homicides with more than one victim. It seems likely that the widespread use of guns made some attacks—especially those with multiple victims—more deadly.
- \* The majority of the perpetrators (20 of 36, responsible for 15 of 29 fatal incidents) either had a known history of substance abuse or were known to be under the influence of illicit drugs or alcohol at the time of the incident. The true number may be even higher, since the investigations of most other cases were inconclusive regarding whether the perpetrator was a substance abuser or under the influence of alcohol or drugs at the time of the homicide. The relationship between violent crime—including homicide—and substance abuse is well established (see Ap-

d substance abuse is well established (see Appendix E). The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University reports that 73 percent of state and 65 percent of both federal and jail violent offenders have regularly used drugs or have a history of alcoholism or alcohol abuse, committed their crime to get money for drugs, or were under the influence of drugs at the time of their crime.<sup>34</sup> Without the influence of alcohol and drugs, some of the perpetrators might not have been driven to kill.



### 3. Nonfatal Violence at Work

In order to assess the extent of nonfatal violence in the USPS and compare it with the national workforce, the Commission conducted the most comprehensive survey ever undertaken on the topics of physical assault, sexual harassment, and verbal abuse in the American workplace. The survey included questions about topics potentially related to violence, such as attitudes about work, psychological conditions, and substance abuse. The Commission surveyed nearly 12,000 postal employees and 3,000 employees in the national workforce from July to December 1999. The full survey and responses are included in Appendix C.

The response rate was more than 65 percent for the postal sample and more than 63 percent for the national sample. The margins of error are narrow: for the sample of postal employees, plus or minus 0.9 percentage points or less; for the sample of the national workforce, plus or minus 1.8 percentage points or less. In comparing the two samples, differences as small as one to two percentage points are statistically significant. Appendix F describes the survey methodology.

The Commission also analyzed data on threats, assaults, and robberies reported to the Postal Inspection Service, and we examined the National Crime Victimization Survey, which until now has been the best available source of data on workplace violence.

#### National Crime Victimization Survey

The Department of Justice's National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) shows that in 1998 (the most recent year for which data are available), 1.6 million people were the victims of violent crime at work.<sup>35</sup> The NCVS indicates that, like violence generally, nonfatal workplace violence has been declining in

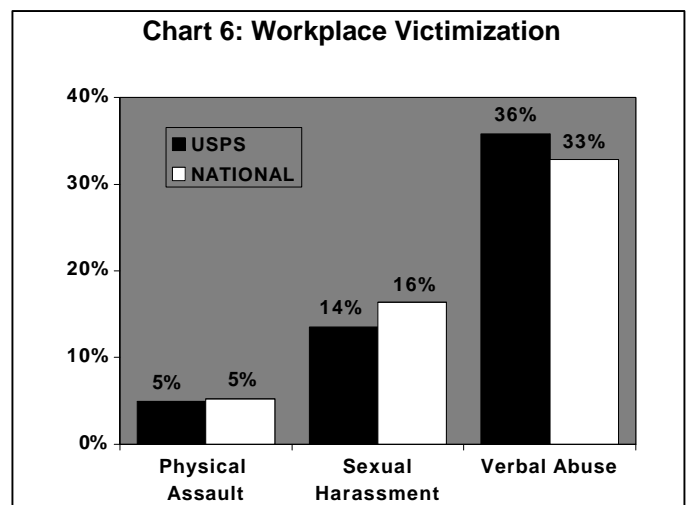
recent years, from 1.6 percent of workers in 1993 to 1.1 percent in 1998.<sup>36</sup>

Among occupations, the NCVS shows that law enforcement officers suffered the highest rate of non-fatal workplace violence (29.4 percent of workers in 1993 through 1998), followed by prison and jail guards (14.7 percent), mental health workers (11.7 percent), and taxi drivers (11.0 percent).<sup>37</sup>

The NCVS has a number of characteristics limiting its usefulness for the Commission's work. It does not identify postal employees, and has several design features that make any comparisons with our survey impossible. We cannot use the NCVS as a source of national estimates for comparison with our survey of postal employees.<sup>38</sup>

#### NONFATAL VIOLENCE: SURVEY RESULTS

By and large, our unprecedented survey reveals that USPS employees are no more likely than those in the national workforce to be subjected to non-fatal



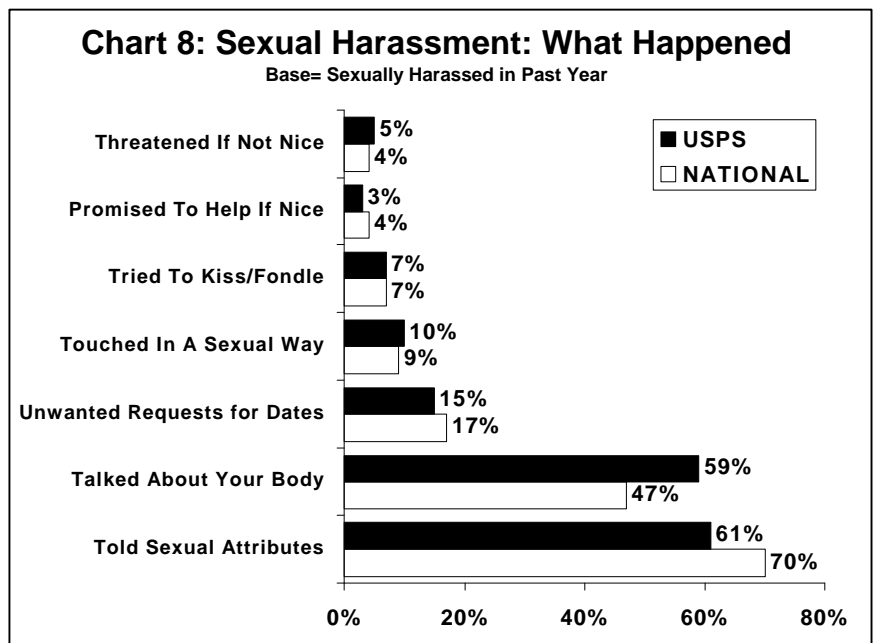
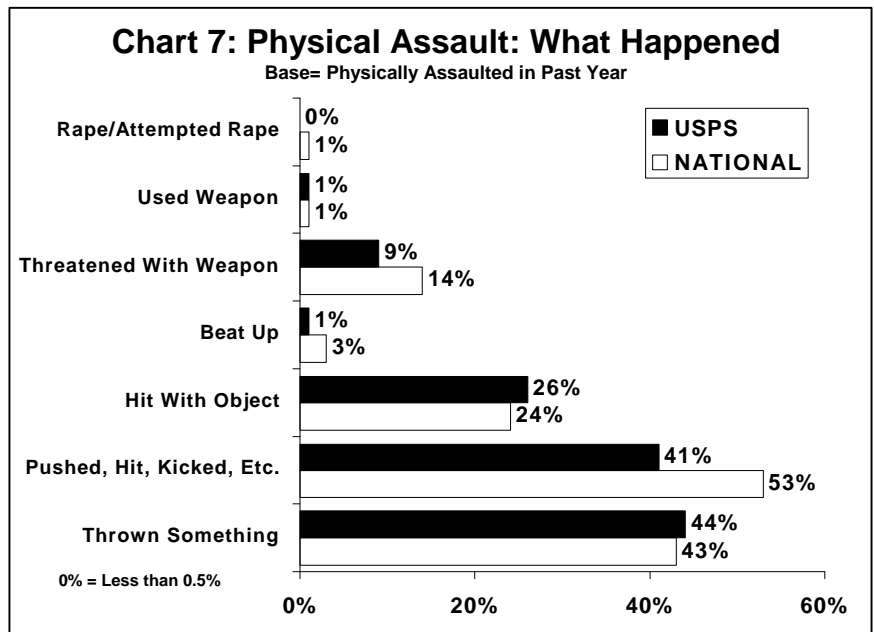
violence. However, the Commission finds a disturbing level of violence in the American workplace (Chart 6). In the past year at work, one in 20 employees in the national workforce was physically assaulted, one in six was sexually harassed, and one in three was verbally abused.

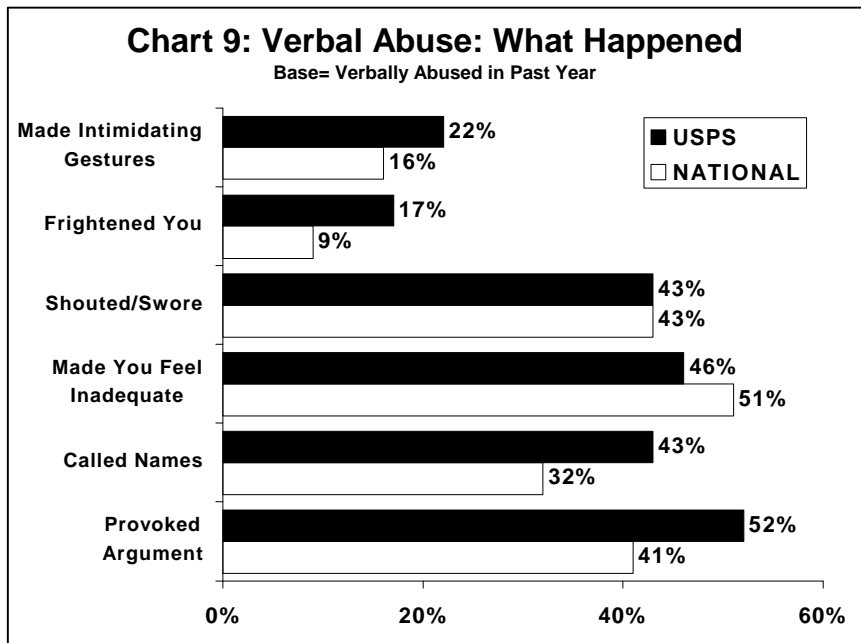
\* Overall, postal workers and employees in the national workforce are equally likely to say they were physically assaulted at work in the past year (5 percent). In order to avoid confusion over different people's definitions of violence, the survey asked specific, concrete questions. The survey's definition of physical assault includes throwing something, pushing, grabbing, slapping, hitting or kicking, hitting with an object, beating, rape or attempted rape, and the threat or use of weapons (Chart 7).

\* Overall, postal workers are slightly less likely than employees in the national workforce to say they were subject to behavior usually considered sexual harassment at work in the past year (14 vs. 16 percent). Again, to avoid confusion over definitions of sexual harassment, we asked specific questions and we report statistics on the percentage of workers who experienced the behaviors, regardless of whether they considered them to be sexual harassment. These incidents include talk about the perpetrator's sexual attributes or behavior; comments about the victim's body; repeated unwanted requests for dates; unwanted sexual touching, kissing, or fondling; and threats of reprisals or rewards based on being "nice" to the perpetrator (Chart

8). Among those who experienced these behaviors, 35 percent of postal workers and 23 percent of those in the national workforce themselves consider the behavior to be sexual harassment.

\* Postal workers are slightly more likely than employees in the national workforce to say they were verbally abused at work in the past year





(36 vs. 33 percent). Again, to avoid confusion, the survey asked specific questions about behaviors. The survey's definition of verbal abuse includes provoking arguments, calling names or putting people down in front of others, making people feel inadequate, shouting or swearing, frightening people, and making intimidating or threatening gestures (Chart 9). This definition presents the most difficult eye-of-the-beholder problem. For example, what a worker may consider verbal abuse in the sense of being made to feel inadequate, a manager may consider a way to motivate that worker to improve performance.

### Victimization by Outsiders

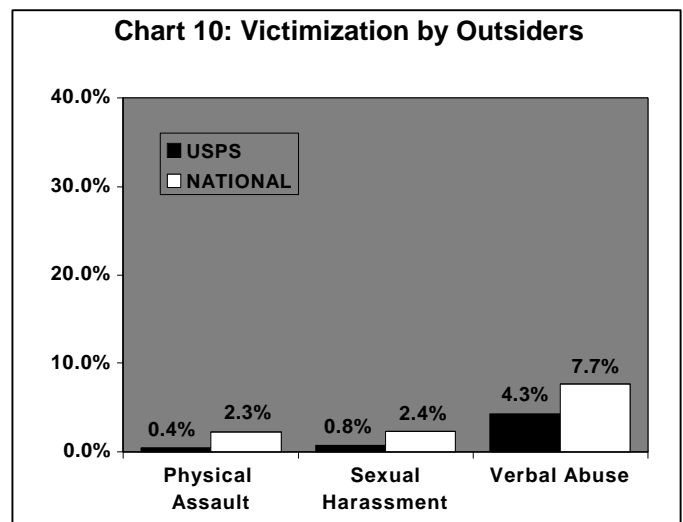
Postal employees are less likely than those in the national workforce to be victims of physical assault, sexual harassment, and verbal abuse at work by outsiders—customers, friends, relatives, or other non-employees (Chart 10).

- \* Postal employees are one sixth as likely as those in the national workforce to say they were physically assaulted at work in the past year by an outsider (0.4 vs. 2.3 percent). An additional 0.3 percent of postal employees say they were

physically assaulted in the past year but do not say whether the offender was a coworker or an outsider.

- \* Postal employees are one third as likely as those in the national workforce to say they were sexually harassed at work in the past year by an outsider (0.8 vs. 2.4 percent). An additional 0.7 percent of postal employees say they were sexually harassed in the past year but do not say whether the offender was a coworker or an outsider.

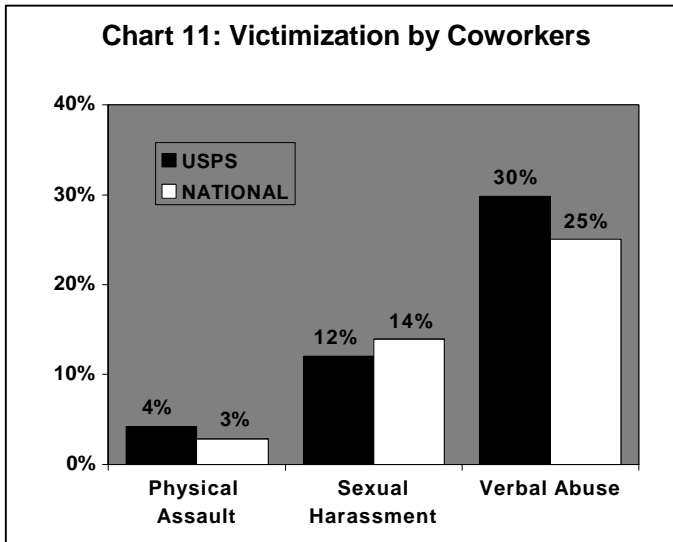
- \* Postal employees are half as likely



as those in the national workforce to say they were verbally abused at work in the past year by an outsider (4 vs. 8 percent).

### Victimization by Coworkers

Postal employees are about as likely as employees in the national workforce to be victims of physical assault, sexual harassment, and verbal abuse by coworkers—supervisors, subordinates and other employees (Chart 11).

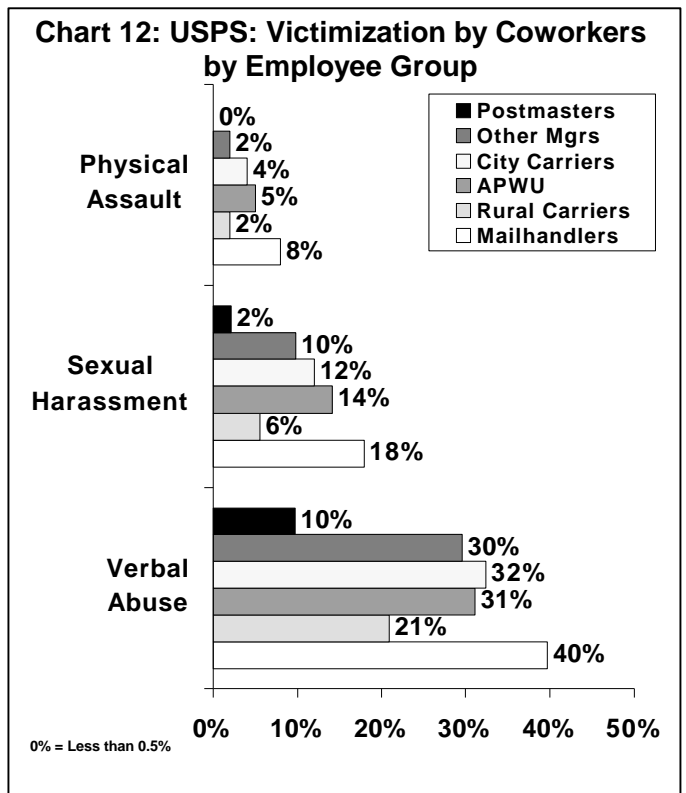


- \* Four percent of postal employees and three percent of those in the national workforce say they were physically assaulted by a coworker at work in the past year.
- \* Twelve percent of postal employees and 14 percent of those in the national workforce say they were sexually harassed by a coworker at work in the past year.
- \* Thirty percent of postal employees and 25 percent of those in the national workforce say they were verbally abused by a coworker at work in the past year.

**Different Jobs, Different Risks**

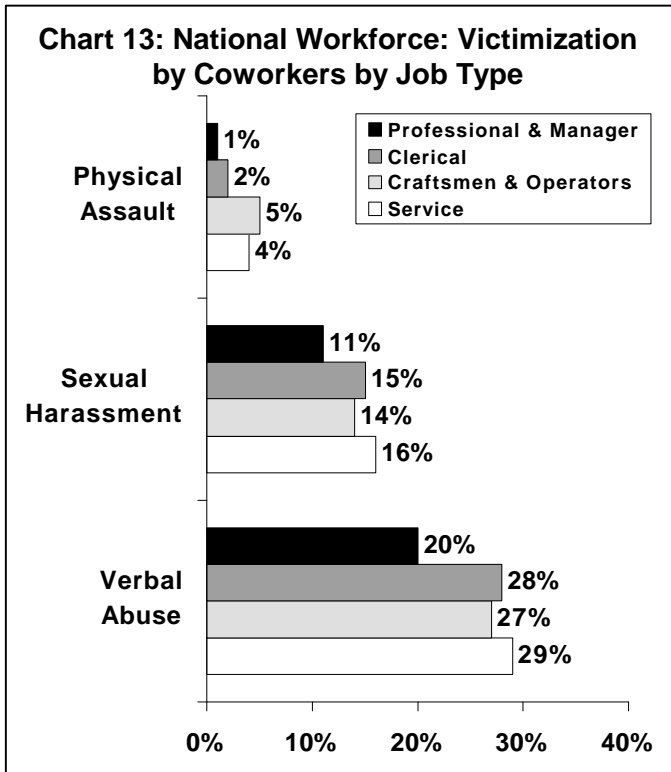
Different jobs carry different risks of violence at work. Some postal employees, such as letter carriers, interact with the public and spend much of their time on their own on the street. Others, such as mail handlers, typically work in large facilities and do not interact with the public. We looked at postmasters, other managers, city letter carriers, rural letter carriers, mail handlers, and employees (clerks, mechanics, motor vehicle operators, and others) represented by the American Postal Workers Union. We also examined four broad occupational groups within the national workforce: professionals/managers, clerical workers, craftsmen/operators, and service workers.

\* **Postal Employees' Victimization by Coworkers.** Among postal employees, mail handlers are the most likely to be physically assaulted (8 percent), sexually harassed (18 percent), and verbally abused (40 percent) by coworkers. Postmasters are the least likely to be subject to physical assault (less than 0.5 percent), sexual harassment (2 percent), or verbal abuse (10 percent) by coworkers. Rural carriers also have a low risk of assault (2 percent), harassment (6 percent), and abuse (21 percent) by



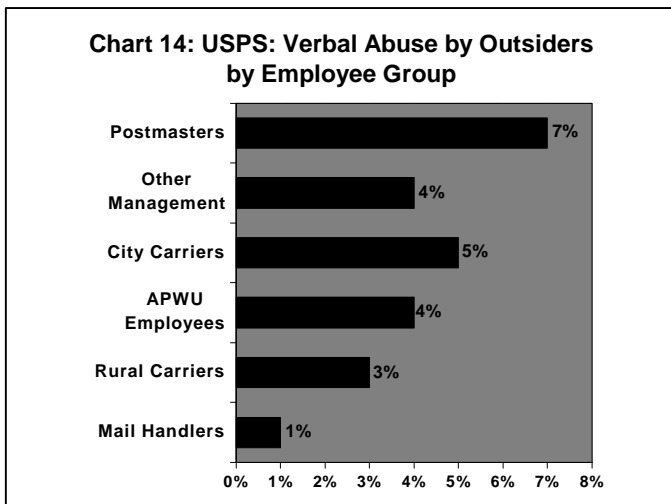
coworkers (Chart 12).

- \* **National Workforce Victimization by Coworkers.** In the national workforce, craftsmen and operators are the most likely to be physically assaulted by coworkers (5 percent), while service and clerical workers are the most likely to be sexually harassed (16 and 15 percent) and verbally abused (29 and 28 percent). Professionals and managers are the least likely to be physically



assaulted (1 percent), sexually harassed (11 percent), or verbally abused (20 percent) by coworkers (Chart 13).

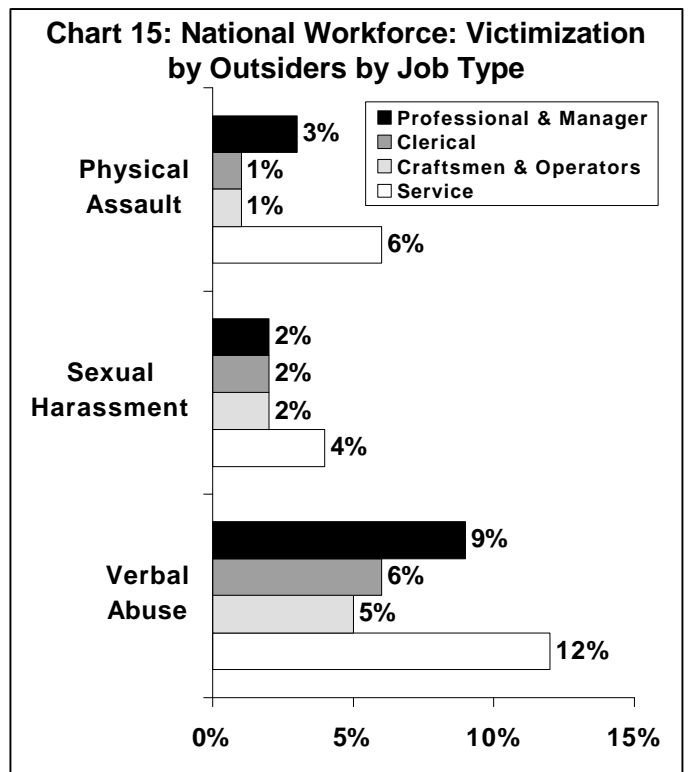
\* **Postal Employees' Victimization by Outsiders.** Among postal employees, rates of physical



assault and sexual harassment by outsiders are less than 1.5 percent for all six groups—too low

to show meaningful variation. Verbal abuse by outsiders is highest among postmasters (7 percent) and city carriers (5 percent), and lowest among mail handlers (1 percent) (Chart 14).

\* **National Workforce Victimization by Outsiders.** In the national workforce, service workers are likeliest to be physically assaulted (6 percent), sexually harassed (4 percent), or verbally abused (12 percent) by outsiders. Clerical workers and craftsmen/operators are least likely to be physically assaulted by outsiders (1 per-



cent). Professionals/managers, clerical workers, and craftsmen/operators all have the same low rate of sexual harassment by outsiders (2 percent). Clerical workers and craftsmen/operators are least likely to be verbally abused by outsiders (6 and 5 percent) (Chart 15).

**Anger, Hostility, Aggressiveness, Stress, Depression, Coping, Distress, Anxiety**



Psychological factors might explain violence committed by employees. Consequently, the survey measured anger, hostility, aggressiveness, and other psychological factors. The Commission found that:

- \* Postal Service employees are less angry, hostile, and aggressive than employees in the national workforce.
- \* Postal workers are less distressed and anxious than employees in the national workforce, and cope better.
- \* Postal workers are more likely to report little or no stress in the average week (39 vs. 28 percent) and the rate of clinical depression is lower among postal employees (11 vs. 15 percent).

To develop questions in these areas, we conducted a review of the professional literature and existing survey instruments covering similar topics. For example, the survey questions measuring verbal and physical aggressiveness, hostility, and anger are based on the Buss Aggression Questionnaire, which has been widely used and tested for reliability and validity.<sup>39</sup> We also developed original questions where necessary, based on interviews and focus groups with postal employees. In analyzing the survey, we combined questions into composite scales based on factor analysis, a standard technique that groups together items with high correlations.

**Anger.** On five separate indicators of anger, postal employees consistently score lower than employees in the national workforce:

- \* Postal employees are less than half as likely to agree that "sometimes I fly off the handle for no good reason" (3 vs. 7 percent).
- \* Postal employees are less likely to agree that "I have trouble controlling my temper" (4 vs. 6 percent).
- \* Postal employees are less likely to agree that "some of my friends think I am a hothead" (4 vs. 7 percent).

- \* Postal employees are less likely to agree that "I flare up quickly but get over it quickly" (18 vs. 25 percent).
- \* Postal employees are more likely to agree that "I am an even-tempered person" (75 vs. 69 percent).

Postal employees are half as likely as the national workforce to score high on a summary index of these five measures of anger (4 vs. 8 percent).

**Hostility.** On five separate indicators of hostility, postal employees consistently score lower than employees in the national workforce:

- \* Postal employees are less likely to agree that "when people are especially nice, I wonder what they want" (22 vs. 25 percent).
- \* Postal employees are less likely to agree that "I sometimes feel that people are laughing behind my back" (11 vs. 13 percent).
- \* Postal employees are less likely to agree that "I wonder why sometimes I feel so bitter about things" (10 vs. 16 percent).
- \* Postal employees are less likely to agree that "at times I feel I have gotten a raw deal out of life" (17 vs. 24 percent).
- \* Postal employees are marginally less likely to agree that "other people always seem to get the breaks" (19 vs. 20 percent).

Postal employees are less likely than the national workforce to score high on a summary index of these five measures of hostility (14 vs. 18 percent).

**Verbal Aggressiveness.** On four separate measures of verbal aggressiveness, postal employees consistently score lower than employees in the national workforce:

- \* Postal employees are less likely to agree that "my friends say that I'm somewhat argumentative" (10 vs. 17 percent).
- \* Postal employees are less likely to agree that "when people annoy me, I may tell them what I think of them" (29 vs. 35 percent).

- \* Postal employees are less likely to agree that "I often find myself disagreeing with people" (16 vs. 21 percent).
- \* Postal employees are less likely to agree that "I tell friends openly when I disagree with them" (77 vs. 82 percent).

Postal employees are less likely to score high on a summary index of these four measures of verbal aggressiveness (26 vs. 34 percent).

**Physical Aggressiveness.** On four out of five measures of physical aggressiveness, postal employees score lower than employees in the national workforce:

- \* Postal employees are less likely to agree that "there are people who have pushed me so far that we came to blows" (6 vs. 9 percent).
- \* Postal employees are less likely to agree that "if I have to resort to violence to protect my rights, I will" (20 vs. 29 percent).
- \* Postal employees are less likely to agree that "given enough provocation, I may hit another person" (13 vs. 20 percent).
- \* Postal employees are less likely to agree that "once in a while I can't control the urge to strike another person" (3 vs. 5 percent).
- \* Postal employees are just as likely to agree that "I can think of no good reason for ever hitting another person" (53 percent).

Postal employees are less likely than the national workforce to score high on a summary index of these five measures of physical aggressiveness (8 vs. 12 percent).

**Coping.** On four separate measures of coping in the past month, postal employees consistently score better than employees in the national workforce:

- \* Postal employees are less likely to say that they have felt "difficulties were piling up so high you could not overcome them" (7 vs. 10 percent).

- ? Postal employees are less likely to say that they have felt "unable to control the important things in your life" (7 vs. 10 percent).
- ? Postal employees are more likely to say that they have felt "things were going your way" (58 vs. 56 percent).
- ? Postal employees are more likely to say that they have felt "confident in your ability to handle your personal problems" (80 vs. 78 percent).

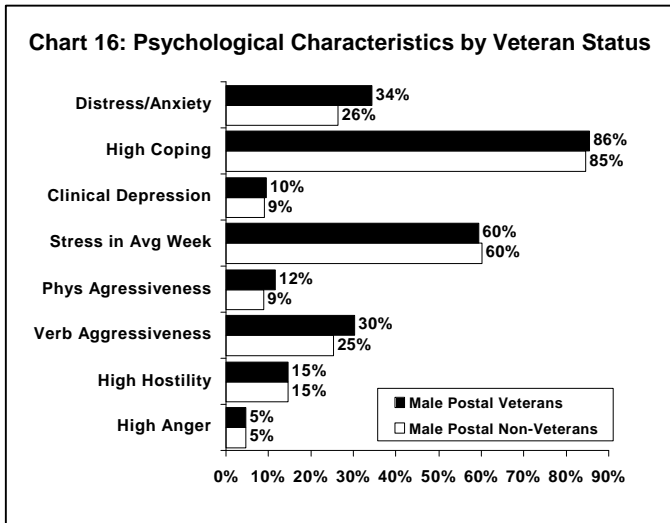
Postal employees are slightly more likely than the national workforce to score high on an index of these four measures (85 vs. 82 percent).

**Distress and Anxiety.** On a ten-measure scale of problems assessing distress and anxiety, postal employees are less likely than employees in the national workforce to say they have experienced any of the problems (26 vs. 34 percent). Postal employees have more positive responses to eight out of ten items, and more negative responses on two items.

Postal employees are less likely than employees in the national workforce to say they have recently:

- \* been feeling unhappy or depressed (15 vs. 17 percent).
- \* been feeling nervous and strung-up all the time (10 vs. 14 percent).
- \* found everything getting too much for you (11 vs. 13 percent).
- \* been taking things hard (8 vs. 13 percent).
- \* felt constantly under strain (12 vs. 20 percent).
- \* been losing sleep because of worry (4 vs. 14 percent).
- \* felt you couldn't overcome your difficulties (4 vs. 7 percent).
- \* been thinking of yourself as a worthless person (4 vs. 5 percent).

Postal employees are more likely to say they have recently "been losing confidence in yourself" (17 vs. 10 percent). They are marginally more likely to say



they have "felt that life is entirely hopeless" (6 vs. 5 percent).

**Veterans.** Because many postal employees and others believe that veterans are more likely than other employees to be violent, we compared postal veterans' psychological characteristics with those of non-veterans. Since veterans are disproportionately male, and we would expect differences in psychological characteristics between men and women, we compared male postal veterans with male postal non-veterans.

Male postal veterans are more likely to be verbally and physically aggressive and to experience distress and anxiety, but they are similar to male postal non-veterans in other psychological characteristics (Chart 16). Male postal veterans and non-veterans are equally likely to score high on the summary indices of anger (5 percent) and hostility (15 percent). Male postal veterans are more likely than non-veterans to score high on the summary indices of verbal aggressiveness (30 vs. 25 percent) and physical aggressiveness (12 vs. 9 percent). Male postal veterans and non-veterans are equally likely to experience stress in the average week (60 percent). Male postal veterans are marginally more likely to experience clinical depression (10 vs. 9 percent) and to score high on the summary index of ability to cope (86 vs. 85 percent). They are more likely to score high on the

summary index of distress and anxiety (34 vs. 26 percent).

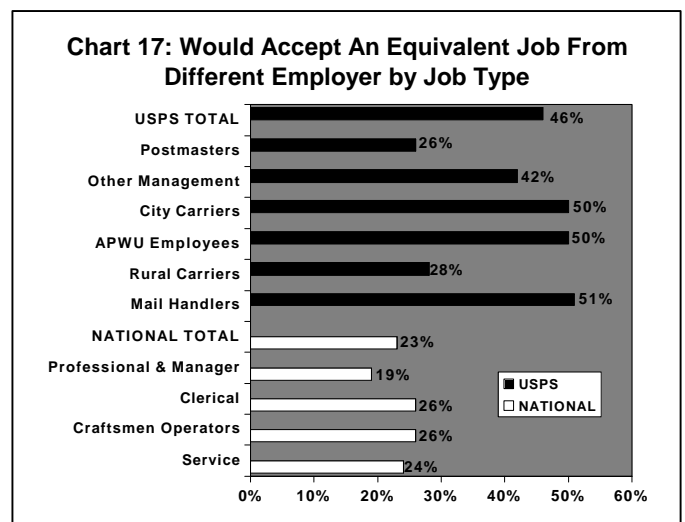
## Attitudes Toward Work, Coworkers, and Management

In contrast with their positive scores on general psychological measures, postal employees have more negative attitudes than employees in the national workforce about work, coworkers, and management.

**Attitudes about Work.** Overall, postal employees are twice as likely as employees in the national workforce to say they would accept a job offer from a different employer with the same wages, retirement and fringe benefits (46 vs. 23 percent) (Chart 17). They are more likely than other government employees to say they would accept such an offer (46 vs. 28 percent).<sup>40</sup>

Responses by postal employees in different jobs vary widely. Postmasters (26 percent) and rural carriers (28 percent) appear to be nearly as attached to their current employer as the average worker in the national workforce (23 percent). Half of city carriers (50 percent), APWU employees (50 percent), and mail handlers (51 percent) say that they would likely accept a job offer from another employer.

**Attitudes about Coworkers.** On four separate questions about coworkers, postal employees have



more negative attitudes than the national workforce.

- \* Postal employees are more likely to agree that "people around here hold grudges" (57 vs. 39 percent).
- \* Postal employees are twice as likely to agree that "employees I work with should not be working here because of their mental or emotional problems" (25 vs. 13 percent).
- \* Postal employees are four times as likely to agree that "the use of threats or violence is an effective way to get things done in the workplace" (8 vs. 2 percent).
- \* Postal employees are less likely to agree that "the people where I work are generally polite and respectful of each other" (76 vs. 87 percent).

Postal employees are twice as likely as employees nationally to score negatively on a summary index of these attitudes (31 vs. 14 percent). Postal employees are less likely than the national workforce to say they socialize with coworkers outside of the workplace sometimes or often (46 vs. 52 percent).

**Attitudes about Management.** On seven separate measures of attitudes toward management, postal employees consistently have a more negative orientation than employees in the national workforce. Postal employees are less likely to agree that:

- \* "I have confidence in the fairness and honesty of management" (37 vs. 60 percent).
- \* "My boss has always been fair in dealing with me" (63 vs. 75 percent).
- \* "Management tells employees about company plans and developments" (57 vs. 66 percent).
- \* "If I have a complaint to make, I feel free to talk to someone up the line" (59 vs. 76 percent).
- \* "My boss gives us credit and praise for work well done" (51 vs. 68 percent).
- \* "Management is doing its best to give us good working conditions" (55 vs. 77 percent).

- ? "Management does everything possible to prevent accidents in our work" (63 vs. 79 percent).

Postal employees are less likely than employees in the national workforce to score positively on a summary index of these measures (58 vs. 79 percent). Postal employees are also less likely than the national workforce to agree that their employer "takes action to protect employees against violence by non-employees" (52 vs. 70 percent), despite low rates of violence by outsiders against postal employees. In addition, postal employees are more likely than the national workforce to agree that "many...managers and supervisors...try to provoke employees to violence" (27 vs. 6 percent).

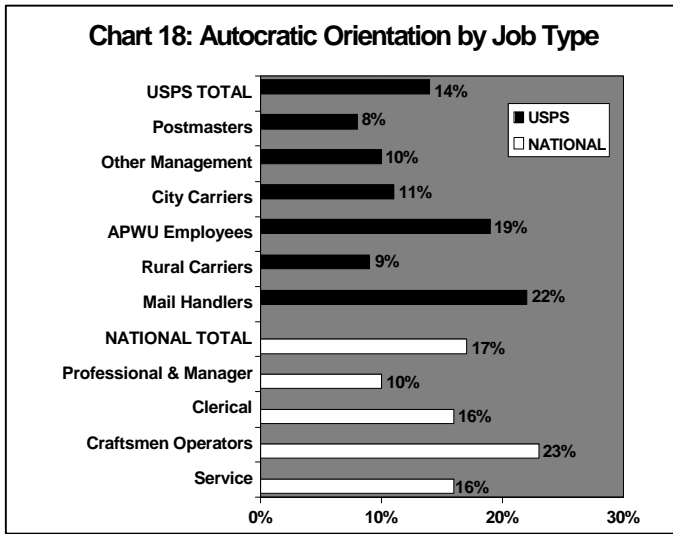
## Work Environment

**Autonomy.** On four separate measures of job autonomy, postal employees score consistently lower than workers in the national workforce:

- \* Postal employees are less than half as likely to agree that "I am responsible for counseling my subordinates or helping them solve their problems" (22 vs. 50 percent).
- \* Postal employees are half as likely to agree that "I have a lot to say about what happens on my job" (32 vs. 63 percent).
- \* Postal employees are less likely to agree that "I get to do a variety of different things on my job" (59 vs. 85 percent).
- \* Postal employees are more than twice as likely to agree that "on my job, I have very little freedom to decide how I do my work" (48 vs. 23 percent).

Postal employees are half as likely as the national workforce to score high on a summary index of these measures (39 vs. 77 percent).

**Pressure.** Postal employees feel more pressured at work than those in the national workforce. Postal employees are less likely to agree that they have enough time to get the job done (54 vs. 63 percent). They are also less likely to agree that they are not



asked to do an excessive amount of work (39 vs. 46 percent).

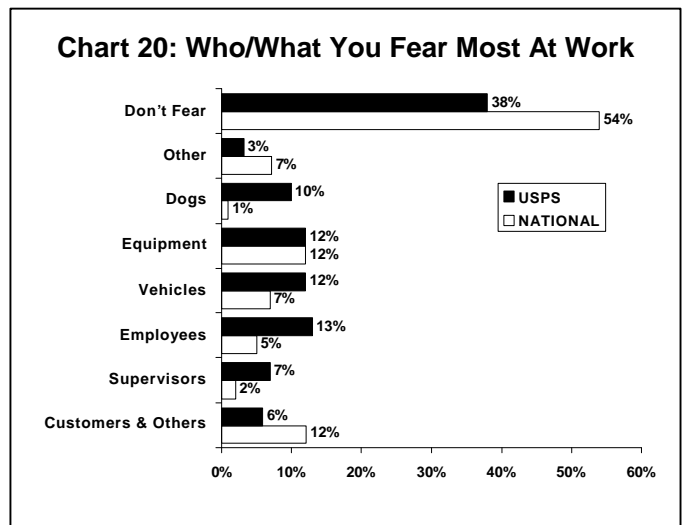
**Autocratic Attitudes.** The survey asked a series of questions to measure autocratic attitudes, such as whether it is best to follow instructions without question and whether workers need close supervision. On a summary index of these questions, postal employees are less likely than those in the national workforce to have autocratic attitudes (14 vs. 17 percent). Postmasters and other postal managers are no more likely to have autocratic attitudes than professionals and managers nationally (8 and 10 percent for postmasters and other postal managers vs. 10 percent for professionals and managers nationally) (Chart 18).

**Fears about Safety at Work**

Postal employees are more likely than those in the national workforce to say they fear being robbed or attacked at work (13 vs. 8 percent). The same proportion of postal and national workforce employees believe they are more likely than the average worker to be victims of workplace violence from people they do not work with (16 and 15 percent). But postal employees are almost six times likelier than those in the national workforce to believe they are more likely than the average worker to be victims of

workplace violence from coworkers (17 vs. 3 percent) (Chart 19).

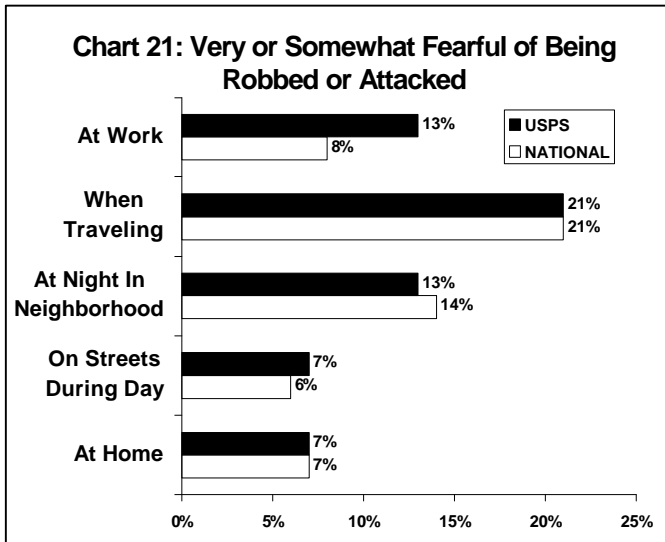
All employees were asked what they most feared at work. Postal employees are less likely than those in the national workforce to say they do not fear for their safety at work (38 vs. 54 percent). Postal employees are more than twice as likely as those in the national workforce to say that supervisors (7 vs. 2 percent) and other employees (13 vs. 5 percent) cause them the most fear for their safety at work.



Postal workers are less likely to say that they fear customers or other non-employees the most (6 vs. 12 percent) (Chart 20).

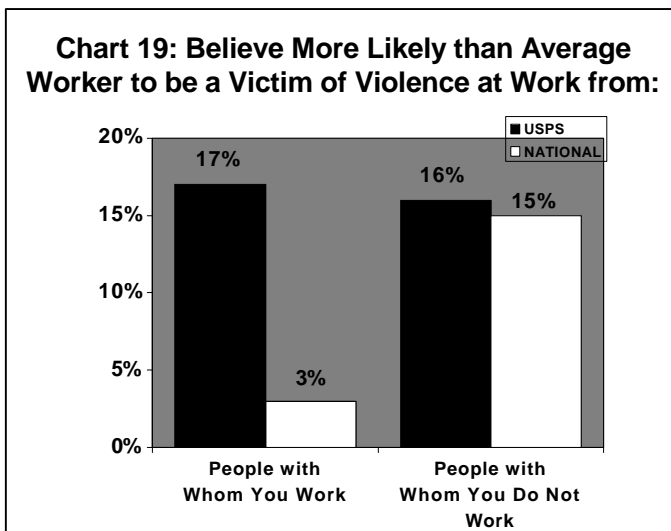
When asked about fears in other settings, both postal employees and those in the national workforce are most likely to say they are very or somewhat fearful of being robbed or attacked while traveling on vacation or for business (21 percent). Similar proportions of postal employees and the national workforce fear being robbed or attacked in their neighborhood at night (13 and 14 percent), on the streets during the day (7 and 6 percent), or at home (7 percent) (Chart 21).

**Discrimination**



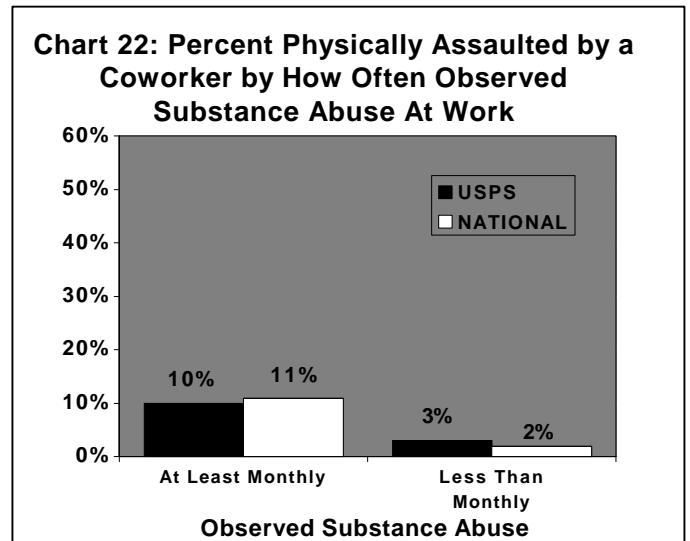
Postal employees are more likely than those in the national workforce to say they have been discriminated against in the past year due to race (9 vs. 4 percent), gender (9 vs. 5 percent), or a physical disability or health problem (8 vs. 2 percent). Both at the Postal Service and in the national workforce, only one percent of workers say they have been discriminated against because of a mental health problem or disability.

White Postal Service employees are three times more likely than White employees in the national workforce to say they have been discriminated against (6 vs. 2 percent). Among Blacks, rates of



reported racial/ethnic discrimination are lower among postal employees than those in the national workforce (17 vs. 20 percent); among Hispanics, the rates are the same (11 percent).

Both men and women Postal Service workers are likelier than those in the national workforce to say they have been discriminated against (for men, 7 vs.



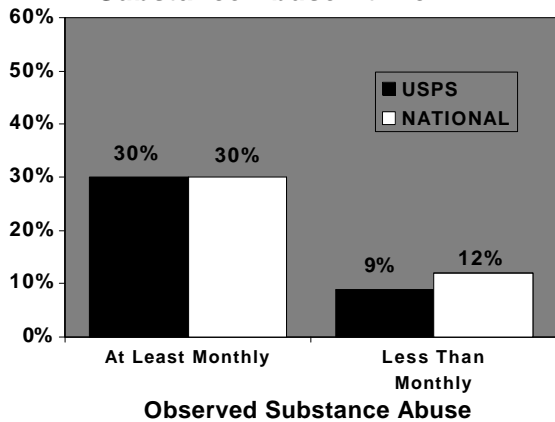
3 percent; for women, 11 vs. 7 percent)

### Substance Abuse and Workplace Violence

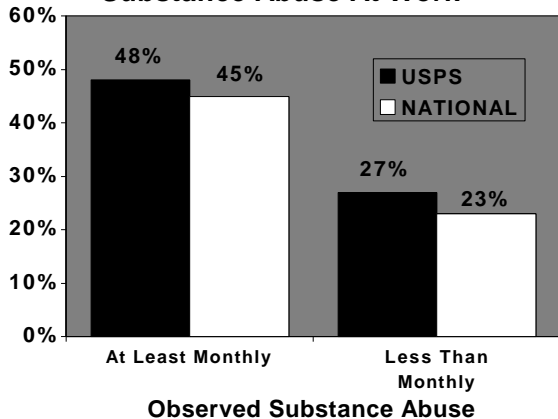
Postal employees are more likely than employees nationally to say that in the past year at work they have seen individuals under the influence of alcohol (23 vs. 15 percent). They are less likely to have seen individuals under the influence of marijuana (5 vs. 8 percent) and about as likely to have seen individuals under the influence of other illicit drugs (4 and 5 percent). The more often postal and national employees observe substance abuse at work, the likelier they are to be victims of physical assault, sexual harassment, and verbal abuse by coworkers.

\* **Physical Assault.** Employees in the national workforce who observe substance abuse in the workplace at least monthly are five times likelier to have been physically assaulted in the past year by a coworker than those who observe substance

**Chart 23: Percent Sexually Harassed by a Coworker by How Often Observed Substance Abuse At Work**



**Chart 24: Percent Verbally Abused by a Coworker by How Often Observed Substance Abuse At Work**



abuse less than monthly (11 vs. 2 percent). Among postal workers, the corresponding rates are similar (10 vs. 3 percent) (Chart 22).

- \* **Sexual Harassment.** Employees in the national workforce who observe substance abuse in the workplace at least monthly are two-and-a-half times likelier to have been sexually harassed by a coworker in the past year than those who observe substance abuse less than monthly (30 vs. 12 percent). Among postal employees, the corresponding rates are similar (30 vs. 9 percent) (Chart 23).

- \* **Verbal Abuse.** Employees in the national workforce who observe substance abuse in the workplace at least monthly are twice as likely to have been verbally abused by a coworker in the past year as those who observe substance abuse less than monthly (45 vs. 23 percent). Among postal employees, the corresponding rates are similar (48 vs. 27 percent) (Chart 24).

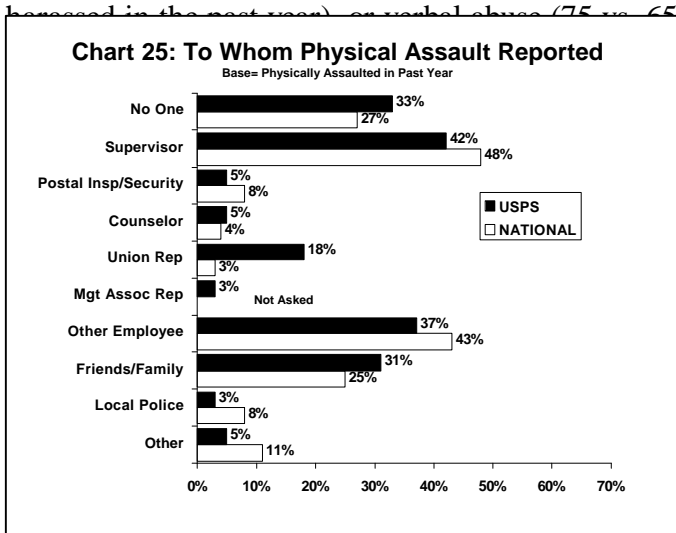
**Substance Abuse by Perpetrators of Physical Assault.** Among victims of physical assault by coworkers in the past year, seven percent of both postal and national workforce employees believe the perpetrator was under the influence of alcohol or drugs. A fifth of those who were victims of physical assault by outsiders think the perpetrator was under the influence of alcohol or drugs (21 percent of postal employees, 22 percent of national workforce employees).

**Substance Abuse by Perpetrators of Sexual Harassment.** Among victims of sexual harassment by coworkers in the past year, three percent of postal and national workforce employees believe the perpetrator was under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Among victims of sexual harassment by outsiders, ten percent of postal employees and 18 percent of all employees think the perpetrator was under the influence.

**Substance Abuse by Perpetrators of Verbal Abuse.** Among victims of verbal abuse by coworkers in the past year, four percent of postal and national workforce employees believe the perpetrator was under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Among those subject to verbal abuse by outsiders, ten percent of postal employees and 17 percent of all employees think the perpetrator was under the influence.

### Consequences of Workplace Violence and Abuse

Postal employees are more likely than those in the national workforce to be upset by physical assault (68 vs. 48 percent of those assaulted in the past year), sexual harassment (26 vs. 18 percent of those

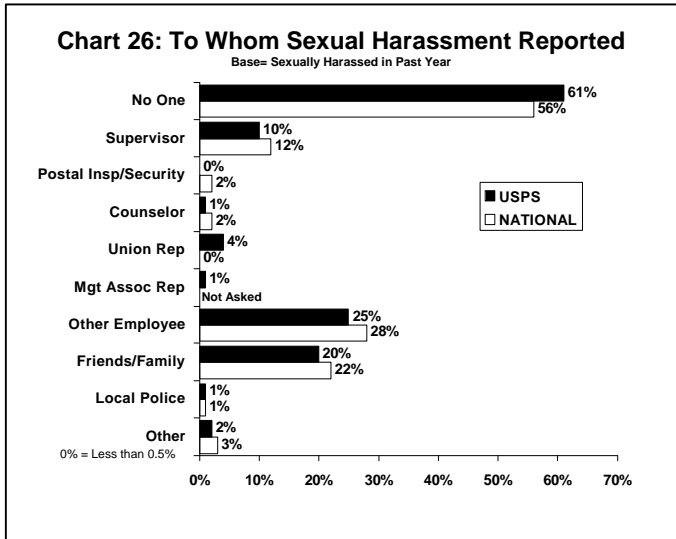


those in the national workforce to be hospitalized (5 vs. 14 percent).

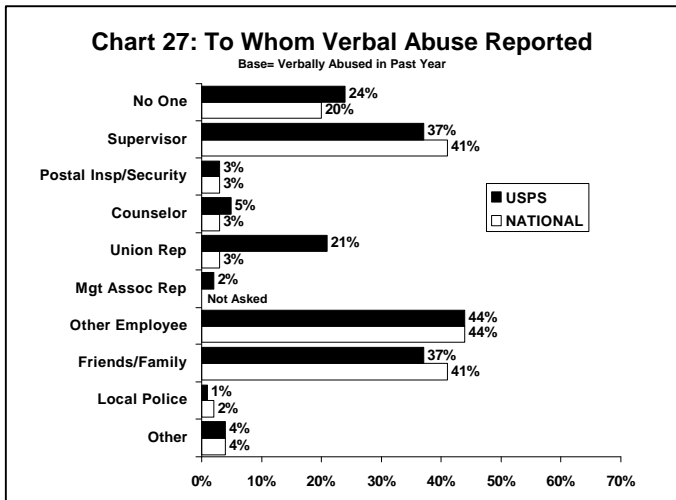
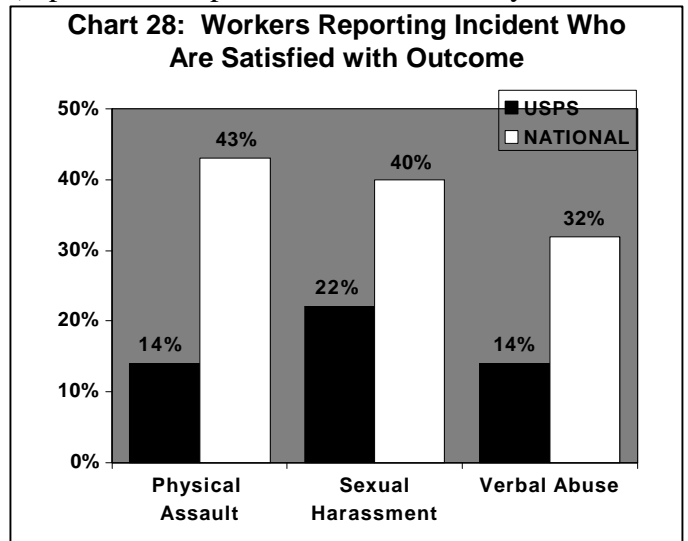
**Reporting Incidents.** Among workers physically assaulted in the past year, 33 percent of postal employees and 27 percent of those in the postal workforce did not report the assault to anyone at all (Chart 25).

Among workers sexually harassed in the past year, 61 percent of postal employees and 56 percent of those in the national workforce did not report the harassment to anyone (Chart 26).

Among workers verbally abused in the past year, 24 percent of postal employees and 20 percent of those in the national workforce did not report the abuse to anyone (Chart 27).



**Satisfaction with Outcome.** Among workers who reported the most recent incident to some authority (supervisor, Inspection Service, security, EAP coun-





## Guns

About one third of both USPS and national workforce employees own guns or firearms (36 and 33 percent). The rates are higher among male workers (46 and 43 percent) than among female workers (23 and 22 percent). Postal employees are less likely than the national workforce to say that in the past year they have seen someone carrying a gun or other weapon to work (3 vs. 8 percent).

## NONFATAL VIOLENCE: INCIDENTS REPORTED TO THE POSTAL INSPECTION SERVICE

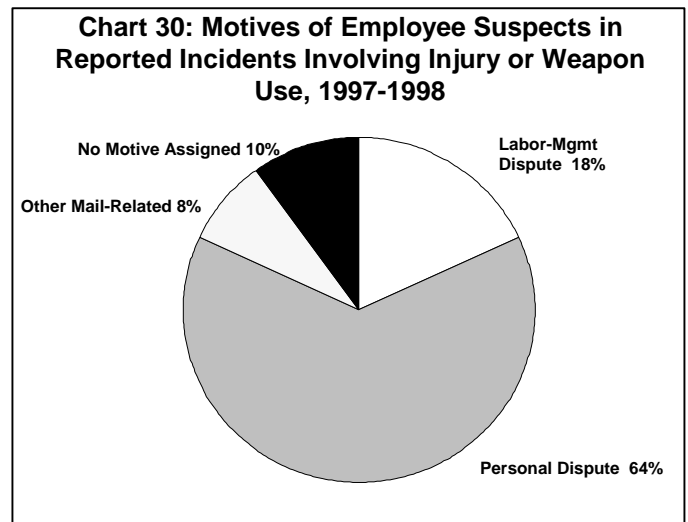
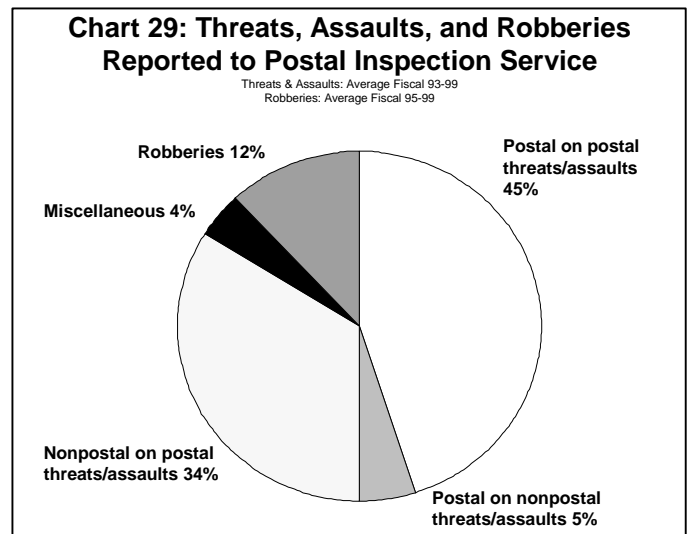
Like crime generally, incidents reported to the Postal Inspection Service have declined during recent years. From fiscal 1995 to fiscal 1999 the number of threats and assaults reported to the Inspection Service declined 35 percent (from 1,820 to 1,174), and robberies declined 54 percent (from 282 to 130).<sup>41</sup> Unlike the survey results, which reflect self-reports of victimization, these data reflect only those incidents that come to the attention of the Postal Inspection Service.

Of the incidents reported, 45 percent were threats or assaults involving postal employees as both suspects and victims; 34 percent, non-employees threatening or assaulting employees; 12 percent, robberies of postal property; five percent, postal employees threatening or assaulting non-employees; four percent, "miscellaneous" including suicides (Chart 29).

We examined in detail the data on threats and assaults reported during 1997 and 1998, with particular attention to 252 cases in which a postal employee was a suspect and there were either injuries or use of a weapon.

**Motives.** In most cases (64 percent), the suspect's motive involved personal disputes; in 18 percent, labor-management disputes; in eight percent, "other mail-related;" in ten percent, no motive was assigned (Chart 30).

**Characteristics of Suspects.** Our analysis of these cases reveals a number of characteristics of suspects



that might be associated with violence: discipline prior to the incident (29 percent); being involved in a personal relationship with the victim (26 percent); having a criminal record related to drugs or violence (24 percent); known personal or family problems (16 percent); possessing a firearm (14 percent); previous threats or assaults (13 percent); involvement in the employee assistance program (13 percent); unusual or changed behavior (12 percent); substance abuse (10 percent) (Chart 31).

Chart 32 shows the likelihood of being a suspect by gender, ethnicity, and job categories. Consistent with patterns in violence generally, men and Blacks were significantly more likely than average to be suspects in incidents reported to the Inspection

**Chart 31: Selected Characteristics of Employee Suspects**

|   | N          | %   |
|---|------------|-----|
| Disciplined prior to incident                           | 72         | 29% |
| Involved in personal relationship with victim           | 66         | 26% |
| Criminal record of drugs or violence                    | 60         | 24% |
| Known personal or family problems                       | 40         | 16% |
| Known to possess firearm                                | 36         | 14% |
| Assault/threat-related actions                          | 34         | 13% |
| Involved in EAP   | 32         | 13% |
| Regularly exhibited unusual behavior or behavior change | 29         | 12% |
| Known to abuse drugs or alcohol                         | 26         | 10% |
| Known to use prescribed psychotropic medication         | 13         | 5%  |
| Diagnosed with a psychological condition                | 10         | 4%  |
| Diagnosed with a physical condition                     | 9          | 4%  |
| Previous military discipline                            | 8          | 3%  |
| Pending or active workers' compensation claim           | 5          | 2%  |
| None of the above characteristics                       | 70         | 28% |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>252</b> |     |

Percents add to more than 100% because some suspects have multiple characteristics.

Service. Overall, 14 workers per 100,000 were suspects annually in cases involving weapons or injuries. For men, the rate was 18 per 100,000. For Blacks, it was 29 per 100,000. Mail handlers—who are more likely than other employee groups to be male and Black—were also significantly more likely than average to be suspects (32 per 100,000).

## GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Overall patterns of nonfatal violence affecting USPS and national workforce employees are similar in many respects. Victimization by non-coworkers is most common for workers who interact with the public, such as letter carriers and postmasters at

**Chart 32: Employee Suspects in Reported Incidents Involving Injury or Weapons Use, by Gender, Ethnicity, and Job Category, 1997 & 1998.**

|                                 | No. Suspects | No. Suspects Per 100,000 Employees |
|---------------------------------|--------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>Total</b>                    | 252          | 14.0                               |
| Male*                           | 190          | 17.7                               |
| Female*                         | 61           | 8.5                                |
| Missing                         | 1            |                                    |
| White*                          | 108          | 9.1                                |
| Black*                          | 108          | 28.5                               |
| Hispanic                        | 17           | 14.1                               |
| Other                           | 17           | 15.5                               |
| Missing                         | 2            |                                    |
| Supervisors/managers            | 18           | 12.2                               |
| Clerks/MV Operators/Maintenance | 83           | 12.1                               |
| City carriers                   | 72           | 15.1                               |
| Rural carriers                  | 6            | 5.9                                |
| Mail Handlers*                  | 39           | 32.1                               |
| Noncareer*                      | 19           | 7.9                                |
| Missing                         | 15           |                                    |

\* Number of suspects per 100,000 employees is significantly different from total number of suspects per 100,000.

USPS and service workers in the national workforce.

There are substantial differences in attitudes and psychological characteristics between USPS employees and those in the national workforce. Postal employees are less angry, aggressive, hostile, depressed, and stressed than the national workforce. They are better able to cope. On the other hand, postal employees have more negative attitudes about work, coworkers, and management than the national workforce. They have less confidence in management's interest in protecting workers and its ability to do so, are more likely to say they have been victims of discrimination, and are more fearful of violence from their coworkers.



## 4. Policies and Practices

The Commission examined policies and practices in a wide range of areas potentially related to workplace violence, including those:

- \* Related to new employees and their selection, screening, orientation, and probationary period;
- \* Aimed at preventing violence, including zero tolerance for violence, violence awareness training, threat assessment and crisis management, systems for monitoring violence and potential violence, security, the employee assistance program, and policies for handling terminations;
- \* That might tend to foster or inhibit violence, including management skills, substance abuse, dispute resolution and labor-management relations, incentives for managers, and incentives for craft employees.

The Commission assessed postal policies, how they are carried out, and the perceptions of craft employees, supervisors and managers, and union officials. Appendix A includes detailed descriptions of policies, practices, and perceptions.

The Commission found that USPS has undertaken comprehensive programs aimed at reducing workplace violence, including every major activity typically recommended by experts in workplace violence. The Commission believes that some programs can be executed more effectively.

The Commission also found that USPS faces particular challenges entrenched in the organization's history and structure. Sources of friction include the longstanding backlog of labor grievances and other disputes, and a structure of conflicting incentives in which pay for managers is linked to performance but pay for craft (union) employees is not.

USPS has launched initiatives to address these sources of friction and other problems in the work

environment. Some have been collaborative efforts of management and the unions; in other cases, some unions and management have disagreed. Change will require sustained commitment by management, unions, management associations, and employees at all levels.

### SELECTION

Selecting employees is a critical element in preventing employee violence because of the documented link between past and future violence (see Appendix D). Selection is particularly important at USPS, because postal employees tend to stay a long time and, as federal employees, they have more protections against termination than many workers in the private sector.

USPS policies for selecting new employees have a number of strengths. On its face, the hiring process includes a pre-employment orientation, a thorough application form, structured interview, drug screening test, post-offer medical assessment, and local and national background checks covering past employment, criminal convictions, prior federal investigations, and military records. Consistent with legal requirements, USPS does not automatically bar from employment anyone with a criminal conviction but considers each case individually (see Appendix D). These elements represent a thorough approach to determining eligibility for employment and suitability for the job. Even without a specific disqualifying factor, hiring officials have the option not to hire an employee who seems unsuitable by using the "rule of three." (For any one job, an applicant is picked from among the top three scorers on the relevant list. An applicant who is passed over three times is no longer considered qualified.)

Weaknesses in the hiring process lie primarily in execution. We describe these below.

## **Background Checks**

The Commission finds that there has been inconsistent implementation of required background checks. Several homicides were committed by employees who probably would not have been hired if the background checks had been more effective. USPS has initiated efforts to improve compliance, such as introducing automated fingerprinting equipment to reduce errors. But background checks still take too long; too often they do not provide information until the probationary period is over, when it is more difficult to dismiss an employee. One inspector commented that "there are two cases where we found out the employees were convicted criminals, but it was too late because they had already passed the 90-day probationary period." There are sometimes delays on the part of the Inspection Service in transmitting information from background checks to human resources officials. The Commission's findings are supported in part by audits independently conducted by the Postal Inspection Service and the General Accounting Office.<sup>42</sup>

## **Veterans' Preference**

Some hiring officials have misconceptions about veterans' preference, believing that preference-eligible veterans must be hired. One manager said, "We barely screen vets because we know we have no choice and...they're impossible to fire." The Commission finds that in some cases hiring officials have made poor decisions because they misunderstood or were intimidated by veterans' preference. At least one homicide was committed by an employee who was given a job because a hiring official felt she had to hire him because he was a veteran.

## **Non-Career Employees**

A number of managers are frustrated that they cannot give special consideration to casual, temporary, substitute, and relief employees for career positions when the non-career employees have already been screened and trained and are known to be good

workers. Probably the best predictor of behavior is prior behavior in similar situations.

## **Probationary Period**

Some managers feel the 90-day probationary period for craft employees is too short. According to one, "Anyone can get through three months. A year would help you detect attendance or performance problems." Others believe the current probationary period is not well used because required evaluations during the probationary period are not timely performed. According to one official, evaluations are often completed *pro forma*, "on day 89."

### **The Commission recommends that USPS:**

- \* **Complete and send to appropriate personnel a background check for every new employee before the end of the 90-day probationary period. USPS should seek to maintain the current 90-day probationary period, but if it is well documented that 90 days is insufficient for appropriate background checks, USPS and the unions should consider extending the period.**
- \* **Ensure that hiring officials understand that all applicants must be screened for eligibility and suitability, including screening for signals of potential violence, regardless of veteran status.**
- \* **Require the timely completion of evaluations before the probationary period ends.**
- \* **Give special consideration to non-career employees in hiring for career positions.**

## **ZERO TOLERANCE FOR VIOLENCE**

The USPS has established a policy of zero tolerance for violence, which echoes a joint statement signed by management and most of the employee organizations in 1992. All the management associations and all the unions except the 344,000-member American Postal Workers Union signed the statement. The policy states that

each and every act or threat of violence, regardless of the initiator, will elicit an immediate and firm response, which could involve discipline up to and including removal.<sup>43</sup>

The national zero tolerance policy does not define threats or violence or specify consequences for particular acts. Each of the 85 performance clusters is responsible for issuing its own local zero tolerance policy.

USPS's policy of zero tolerance is well known: 78 percent of surveyed employees have heard of it. The 1992 joint statement was published in the *Postal Bulletin*, which is sent to all facilities and posted on bulletin boards. The zero tolerance policy is stated in the *Threat Assessment Team Guide*, and is discussed in violence awareness training materials. It is also discussed during orientation for new employees and in a video on workplace environment viewed by all employees during FY2000.

Some managers believe the policy has raised awareness and reduced incidents of aggressive behavior. One official said, "The bar is continually being raised for what constitutes acceptable behavior. More and more, employees speak up when they hear idle threats." In our survey, 61 percent of postal employees say they believe zero tolerance is very or somewhat effective, and 62 percent believe it is applied fairly. The proportion believing that the policy is applied fairly ranges from a high of 86 percent among postmasters to a low of 44 percent among mail handlers. Some employees and union officials believe the policy is enforced only against craft employees, not managers.

Postal employees are as likely as those in the national workforce to agree that "I would definitely be disciplined or punished if I threatened or assaulted someone at work" (88 and 87 percent). However, postal employees are more likely to agree that their employer's "policies make it difficult for employees to protect themselves" (35 vs. 14 percent) and that "it's hard...to fire people for threats or violence" (38 vs. 13 percent).

There is confusion about what the zero tolerance policy means and what the consequences are for different acts. Some supervisors feel it is pointless to try to enforce discipline because their decisions will be overturned through the grievance and arbitration process. One commented, "I've tried writing them up, nothing happens. Supervisors get frustrated, so they look the other way."

In the Commission's focus groups with craft employees, laughter was a common reaction to questions about zero tolerance for violence. Some employees believe the policy is a "joke" and ineffective.

**The Commission recommends that USPS and employee organizations develop clear and specific guidelines for the implementation of the policy of zero tolerance for violence. Such guidelines should define threats and violence by listing specific behavior and providing examples. Guidelines should list specific factors to be considered in determining discipline, such as motivation, record of previous threatening or violent behavior, perceived seriousness of a threat, and degree of actual or potential harm to the victim.**

## **VIOLENCE AWARENESS TRAINING**

USPS conducts violence awareness training programs for managers and craft employees covering such topics as warning signs of workplace violence, prevention strategies, anger management, crisis management planning, and zero tolerance.

The violence awareness program for managers has been incorporated into training for all new supervisors. In responding to our survey, 45 percent of postmasters and 70 percent of other managers say they have participated in a workplace violence awareness program. The national program for craft employees is new in FY2000, but 13 to 16 percent of craft employees say they have participated in a violence awareness program. Across management and crafts in our survey, 80 percent of employees who have participated in workplace violence awareness programs rate them positively.

Weaknesses in the program include the absence of any national ongoing refresher program for managers or craft employees, the fact that substantial numbers of employees at all levels say they have not participated in any programs, and the limited role that unions play in developing the programs. Programs developed and presented jointly by unions and management are likely to have greater credibility with craft employees. Moreover, union officials, like management, have to deal with threatening or violent employees and need training in how to respond.

**The Commission recommends that (a) USPS make training in violence awareness and related areas mandatory for employees at all levels and offer periodic, mandatory refresher training, and (b) unions join management in developing violence awareness programs and union officials receive violence awareness training.**

## **THREAT ASSESSMENT AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT**

In 1997, USPS developed procedures for threat assessment and crisis management. Each of the 85 performance clusters is required to maintain a threat assessment team to assess threats and develop plans to reduce the risk of violence, and a crisis management team to respond to violent incidents by caring for victims and their families and establishing an orderly return to normal operations. Medical and human resources staff usually participate in both teams.

Threat assessment team members are supposed to attend an initial two-day orientation and meet at least quarterly to review threats and responses. Crisis management team members also receive training, and are supposed to conduct regular crisis simulations.

### **Implementation**

In some performance clusters threat assessment teams have not met regularly, and members are unclear about their roles. Threat assessment teams are not well known among employees. Many employees are reluctant to report threats or do not know where

to do so, although the Inspection Service maintains a 24-hour toll-free hotline and the *Threat Assessment Team Guide* states that all employees should be made aware of the existence of the local team and systems supporting zero tolerance. Comments from employees included, "I reported a situation to personnel; it was a week and a half before they called me about it." "You can't report it within the office in certain offices, because there is a clique between the supervisor and the postmaster. If you report to the supervisor, he will laugh." "What options do we have to report something? There's no one that seems to be neutral that you can go to that's not going to cut your throat later. If you report something, you are going to get it later on."

In the performance clusters that the Commission visited, members of crisis management teams generally seemed to understand their roles, had participated in a recent simulation, and felt well prepared to respond to a violent crisis. However, eleven of 85 performance clusters did not conduct any crisis simulations in 1999.

### **Limited Union Role**

There is limited union involvement in threat assessment or crisis management. In at least one homicide by a postal employee, union officials knew of threats and did not share that knowledge with postal officials. Participation by unions may at times generate conflicts with their responsibilities to represent their members in grievance proceedings, since threats and violence often lead to discipline. However, some performance clusters have included unions in their teams, and at one large private employer visited by Commission staff, crisis response teams are joint union/management efforts.

### **Seniority**

The seniority system limits management's ability to defuse volatile situations by transferring employees. Some employees who have been threatened have refused offers to transfer to another facility because they would lose seniority. One employee who did transfer wrote "I used to work for the ...district. This is where I saw a numerous amount of violence.

I have moved in the last year and transferred to the ...district; they do treat employees like people. No violence here." Referring to the consequences of loss of seniority in the new location, the employee added, "The only stress is that when you transfer from one place to another you must become a PTF [part-time flexible], which means no set schedule—all crazy hours—and you must work six days a week. This creates a lot of stress on your home life."<sup>44</sup>

**The Commission recommends that USPS:**

- \* **Hold area Vice Presidents and performance cluster managers accountable through performance reviews and pay incentives for establishing and operating threat assessment and crisis management teams.**
- \* **Improve employee understanding of the threat assessment and crisis management processes, especially how to report threats.**

**The Commission recommends that unions participate in threat assessment and crisis management teams.**

**The Commission recommends that USPS and the unions develop a process for allowing craft employees to transfer between facilities without losing seniority in special circumstances, such as to avoid threats, stalking, or harassment. Such circumstances should be clearly circumscribed so as not to undermine the seniority system overall.**

**Fitness-for-Duty Examinations**

One component of threat assessment may be a fitness-for-duty examination to assess dangerousness. If managers believe an employee has a condition that makes that employee a danger to self or others at work, they may ask postal medical staff to arrange an examination to determine the employee's fitness for duty. While such exams are most commonly used to assess physical capacity, for example after an on-the-job injury, they may also be used to assess mental health or behavioral concerns. Management may discipline an employee for refusing a fitness-for-duty exam.

USPS has developed new draft guidelines for fitness-for-duty exams. These guidelines state that behavioral reasons for requesting an exam may include an increase in unscheduled absences or unexplained lavatory use, changes in behavior or work performance after breaks, changes in behavior toward fellow employees, deterioration in personal hygiene and cleanliness of the work location, or inattention to duties and deterioration in concentration and memory. It is the responsibility of the supervisor to request a fitness-for-duty exam, with concurrence from the installation head. In most instances, before requesting a fitness-for-duty exam on the basis of an employee's behavior, the guidelines suggest the supervisor first approach the employee for a private, confidential discussion, including an offer of services from the occupational health or employee assistance programs.

The occupational health nurse administrator and the labor relations specialist review the supervisor's request in consultation with the human resources manager and, if appropriate, the nurse administrator arranges an appointment for a fitness-for-duty exam. An emergency fitness-for-duty exam may be arranged immediately in cases of acute behavior such as substance abuse, direct threats, altercations, or argumentative behavior.

Physicians employed or selected by USPS carry out fitness-for-duty exams. All general fitness-for-duty exams are supposed to include a mental status evaluation. Typically, a psychiatric exam is not requested without a prior general exam. If the initial exam suggests a psychiatric evaluation is necessary, a board-certified psychiatrist, in consultation with the senior area medical director, should carry out the exam. In some cases, the examiner may recommend a referral to a practitioner with experience evaluating potentially violent individuals. In assessing dangerousness, examiners should address questions such as:

- \* Does the employee pose a threat?
- \* What is the nature and severity of the potential harm?



- \* What is the likelihood that the potential harm will occur?
- \* What is the imminence of the potential harm?
- \* What actions are required to contend with or relieve the problem?

The nursing and medical staff are responsible for interpreting the findings and recommendations of the examiner for management and the employee. The national medical director is to be consulted in interpreting all psychiatric fitness-for-duty exams.

It is not typical for the examiner to interview the supervisor or coworkers. If there are indications of a direct threat, the examiner should be asked to recommend actions to protect the employee and others. If the employee does not represent a clear and direct threat to an identifiable target, the examiner should be asked to recommend treatment or other actions to guard against deterioration of the condition. Management might require an employee to receive counseling, or might require the employee to provide ongoing medical documentation to demonstrate compliance with treatment.

USPS appears to be unusual in having national guidelines for the fitness-for-duty process.<sup>45</sup> However, there are a number of weaknesses in the process. There is no clear requirement for coordination between the fitness-for-duty process and the threat assessment team. Standards for selecting providers to perform exams are unclear. Field medical staff interviewed for this report were unaware that they were required to consult with the national medical director on psychiatric exams. Some supervisors do not know how or when to request an exam. Guidance on how and when to request fitness-for-duty exams is not included in the Associate Supervisor Program or workplace violence awareness training. Approaches to reintegrating employees found fit for duty are inconsistent.

**The Commission recommends that USPS improve the use of fitness-for-duty exams to assess dangerousness by:**

- \* **Requiring medical staff to coordinate with the threat assessment team.**
- \* **Incorporating guidance about how to request a fitness-for-duty exam to assess dangerousness into the Associate Supervisor Program and workplace violence awareness training for supervisors and managers.**
- \* **Making it standard practice for the threat assessment team to assist managers in developing return-to-work plans for employees found fit for duty after a dangerousness assessment.**
- \* **Clarifying the standards for providers of fitness-for-duty exams to assess dangerousness.**
- \* **Communicating to field medical staff the requirement to consult with the national medical director in interpreting psychiatric fitness-for-duty exams.**

## **SYSTEMS FOR TRACKING VIOLENCE AND POTENTIAL VIOLENCE**

USPS collects a great deal of information that might be helpful in assessing the workplace climate and the risk of violence. Some of that information could be more effectively used.

### **Workplace Environment Indicators**

USPS has developed workplace environment indicators that show for each of the 85 performance clusters information on equal employment opportunity (EEO) complaints, grievances filed and resolved, employee survey results, diversity activities, and spending on employee recognition programs. Except for the employee survey results, the indicators are not available for units below the performance cluster level, limiting their usefulness as tools for planning or evaluating activities at specific sites. Data on reported threats and assaults, patterns in the use of the employee assistance program, and the re-

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

performance cluster provide oversight for the program and identify and address systemic problems in the workplace environment. Overall, the EAP is functioning well and most managers, craft employees, and union officials regard it highly.

Our survey found that 85 percent of employees have heard of the EAP and 15 percent have used it in the past two years. Seventy-one percent of employees who have used the EAP rate it positively. Postmasters are most likely to rate the program positively (83 percent) and mail handlers are least likely (62 percent).

At the national level, unions and management cooperate in overseeing the EAP. Locally, joint union-management oversight exists in a few locations, and participants credit such joint oversight with increasing employee confidence in the program and improving labor-management relations.

Unfortunately, some employees have misperceptions and concerns about the program. Some craft employees expressed skepticism about the confidentiality of the program. For example, one said, "I don't care that it is free—I don't want my job knowing my business." Other employees complained about limited accessibility. In our survey, 16 percent of postal employees agree that "the employee assistance program is used by managers and supervisors to punish employees." Mail handlers and city carriers are the most likely to agree (19 percent); postmasters (7 percent) and other managers (6 percent) the least likely.

#### **The Commission recommends that USPS:**

- \* **Increase communication about the employee assistance program, focusing especially on concerns about confidentiality and the perception that the program is used to punish employees.**
- \* **Encourage local joint management/union oversight of the EAP.**

## **TERMINATIONS**

USPS has piloted a training program ("Separation: A Peaceful Parting") to help managers defuse the potential for violence when it is necessary to dismiss an employee. The program aims to teach participants to recognize warning signs of violence, know how to get help during a separation process, and conduct a safe and effective meeting with an employee who is being terminated.

Termination is often associated with high tension, frustration, and anger. Two homicides by postal employees occurred immediately following arbitration decisions upholding their firing. As the employees' representative, unions are responsible for notifying employees of arbitration decisions. The unions do not have standard practices for notifying employees of such decisions. Union officials say they typically notify employees by letter and also by phone or in person. One arbitrator interviewed by the Commission commented, "It is very haphazard how information is relayed to the grievant. The letter sent to the union might be opened by a secretary, and she might tell the employee, who is usually calling in often to find out." The postal employee who killed four individuals and himself in Royal Oak, Michigan, was notified by a message left on his answering machine.

#### **The Commission recommends that:**

- \* **USPS expand the pilot training program "Separation: A Peaceful Parting" nationwide, incorporating lessons from the pilot phase.**
- \* **The unions develop systematic and sensitive procedures and train those responsible for notifying grievants when a termination has been upheld in arbitration.**

## **MANAGEMENT SKILLS**

For decades, outside observers have criticized USPS for a rigid management style. In 1968, the President's Commission on Postal Organization wrote, "Supervision tends to be strongly authoritarian...and there are frequently bad relations between worker and boss."<sup>46</sup> In 1994, the General Accounting Office

described "an autocratic management style...tense and confrontational relations on the workroom floor."<sup>47</sup>

Some USPS managers share this view, although others believe that the culture is changing. USPS leaders have articulated a commitment to change this culture. Nevertheless, our survey shows that USPS employees have more negative views of managers than do employees in the national workforce (see Chapter 3). Arbitrators who handle postal grievance cases commented, "Supervisors...don't have the proper training to manage so they become militaristic," and "Employees are regularly spoken down to—not privately, they do it publicly. The norm is the employee is embarrassed, ridiculed in the presence of other employees." Managers commented, "Maybe 30 percent of managers are good communicators, 70 percent are still from the old school," and "We need to break the paradigm of what a leader is." A craft employee said, "A lot of supervisors don't really talk to their people."

## **Training**

In the past few years, USPS has introduced several training programs to improve managers' interpersonal skills, including one for new supervisors and another to enhance understanding of union contracts. Some managers fear the effectiveness of the training program for new supervisors will be eroded as the new supervisors encounter old-style managers and the reality of the work environment. Some districts offer ongoing support for new supervisors, such as reunions of training classes, but this practice is not universal.

## **First-Level Supervisors**

First-level supervisors have a powerful influence on the workplace environment, but some supervisors, managers, and union officials believe the position is unrewarding and does not attract well-qualified candidates. For example, one supervisor commented, "Supervisors are being asked to encourage employees, but who motivates us? We don't feel like we're recognized. We get a lot of bad feedback." A union official commented that the "supervisor is in the

worst position. They aren't craft anymore...they are the buffer between craft and upper management."

## **Weekly Safety Talks**

The weekly safety talk is a nationally mandated face-to-face meeting between first-line supervisors and craft employees. Supervisors hold these talks on the workroom floor for each shift. Communication materials are provided in some areas to help supervisors prepare and deliver these talks. Typically, the talks include safety and security information, performance updates, and announcements. Information about the EAP and other employee services is sometimes provided during the safety talks. Violence prevention has been a topic in some locations.

The weekly safety talks are used with varying degrees of effectiveness. One local union official commented, "Some units can voice their opinions and concerns at the standup talks, some can't....The post office loves to post things—but they need to be discussed. You need more emphasis on verbal communication."

## **Substance Abuse**

The link between substance abuse and violence is clearly established in research and in the Commission's survey. USPS's policies regarding substance abuse have several strengths, including drug screening for all job applicants; a clear policy prohibiting sale, possession, or use of alcohol or illegal drugs on postal property; a smoke-free work environment; and a comprehensive employee assistance program offering counseling and referrals to treatment. If substance use is suspected, managers may request an emergency fitness-for-duty exam, including drug or alcohol testing if the medical examiner considers it appropriate.

On the other hand, guidelines for responding to violations of the alcohol- and drug-free workplace policy are unclear, supervisors' skills in recognizing substance abuse are weak, and many employees believe substance abuse is largely ignored. One employee commented that his supervisors "have to

smell it [alcohol], because I do, but they don't do anything. They just ignore it."

#### **The Commission recommends that USPS:**

- \* **Improve interpersonal skills of supervisors and managers through ongoing training, including training in conflict management.**
- \* **Track participation of supervisors and managers in training, and hold field managers accountable (through performance reviews and pay incentives) for execution of training programs.**
- \* **Provide continuing training and support for new supervisors, including mentoring and networking.**
- \* **Increase the desirability of first-line supervisory positions through special recognition programs, training, career development opportunities, or pay.**
- \* **Provide training and support to help supervisors use the weekly safety talks effectively, and incorporate violence prevention messages into these talks.**
- \* **Improve training to help supervisors and managers recognize and respond effectively to substance abusers and recovering individuals.**

## **DISPUTE RESOLUTION**

USPS employees file an unusually large number of grievances and equal employment opportunity (EEO) complaints. There are enormous backlogs in both systems, and it can take years to resolve disputes. Unlike employees in other federal agencies, postal employees may file complaints in the two systems simultaneously. Currently, only the rural carriers' national agreement limits dual filing. The mail handlers' agreement states that the union will not encourage dual filing. Many postal employees also have access to the Merit Systems Protection Board appeal process.

## **Grievance Process**

As of April, 2000, USPS had more than 126,000 grievances awaiting arbitration. Many grievances in the backlog are parallel issues grieved separately. For example, the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) filed 40,000 grievances in a dispute over wash-up time in the New York district.

The APWU accounts for more than 100,000 backlogged grievances. These represent 80 percent of the backlog, although APWU represents only 49 percent of career craft employees. Among the 344,000 APWU employees, there is almost one pending grievance for every three employees.

The National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) has the next largest share of grievances, more than 20,000. These represent 16 percent of the backlog, while NALC represents 34 percent of career craft employees. Among the 240,000 NALC employees, there is approximately one pending grievance for every 12 employees.

The National Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU) accounts for about 5,000 grievances. These represent four percent of the backlog, while NPMHU represents nine percent of career craft employees. Among the 61,000 NPMHU employees, there is approximately one pending grievance for every 12 employees.

The National Rural Letter Carriers' Association (NRLCA) has only 74 grievances awaiting arbitration, less than one percent of the backlog, although it represents eight percent of career craft employees. Among the 55,000 career NRLCA employees, there is approximately one pending grievance for every 740 employees.

The annual cost of grievances has recently been estimated at \$217 million.<sup>48</sup> A small industry of more than 300 arbitrators handles postal cases. More than 6,300 grievances were arbitrated in fiscal 1999.

This level of grievance activity appears unmatched in the public or private sectors. By way of comparison, in the auto industry, virtually all grievances are resolved before they reach arbitration. In the entire

auto industry—with about 400,000 bargaining unit employees—only eleven grievances reached arbitration in 1998. Several federal agencies contacted by the Commission reported only a few arbitrations each year. USPS's procedures are similar to those of other organizations that do not have such unusually large numbers of complaints.

Employees and managers are frustrated by the avalanche of grievances. Disputes fester with long delays, potentially spawning violence. Managers blame unions for flooding the system with grievances, and unions blame management for disregarding contracts and automatically denying grievances. Managers' ability to discipline is undermined, and employees cannot gain prompt relief from perceived or actual wrongs. A manager commented, "It doesn't work. It's a huge problem, and there's a link with violence. It gives too much hope to employees and then they get upset when they lose....Takes too long....There needs to be a definite date when it'll be resolved so it can't go on endlessly." Employees' comments included, "They know they violate the contract and tell us to grieve it, because they know it will take a long time;" "It is pointless to kick it up as it gets stuck and you never hear back;" "The grievance process doesn't go anywhere....Makes me think, 'Why should I even bother?'" Grievances take a long time."

Management and the unions have cooperated on a number of initiatives aimed at reducing the number of grievances, encouraging the resolution of grievances at the lowest level, and resolving grievances more quickly. Joint efforts include joint contract administration manuals, mediation, resolving similar issues in groups, joint fact-finding, and district-level arbitration.

USPS recently introduced a new grievance tracking system that offers a tool for identifying patterns in grievances. The new system should improve USPS's capacity to use grievances as indicators of problems, such as complex areas of the contracts, or sites where managers may need additional training in interpreting the contracts or using discipline.

## **Equal Employment Opportunity Complaint Process**

During fiscal year 1999, postal employees filed more than 12,000 formal EEO complaints. As of April, 2000, there were more than 11,000 open cases. Postal workers represent about 31 percent of the federal workforce but account for about 50 percent of the federal complaints filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.<sup>49</sup> USPS has introduced a mediation program as an alternative for resolving EEO complaints. The program, called REDRESS, has been rated positively by participants, who credit it with improving relationships (see box). Comments range from "REDRESS is somewhere employees can express feelings" to "REDRESS...is a much better process because we [management and employees] talk to one another."

Some employees and union officials express distrust in the traditional EEO process because most counselors and investigators are postal employees. According to one local union official, "The major complaint is that employees don't feel the EEO process is neutral like it is communicated. They feel it is tied to management since the EEO person goes to the HR manager's meetings."

## **Labor-Management Relations**

Long-standing patterns of distrust and contentiousness mar relations between management and some of the major unions. The large number of grievances and the frequent use of arbitration to resolve contract disputes are evidence of this situation. Distrust at the national level undermines local cooperation and makes it difficult for the unions and management to collaborate on violence prevention activities, as the Commission recommends. At the request of Congress, since 1998 the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service has facilitated summit meetings at the national level involving all major unions, management, and the management associations. These offer a promising approach to improving relations, but have not yet yielded any joint long-term plans, as Congress intended. Similar meetings do not consistently occur at the local level.

## **EEO Mediation: The REDRESS Program.**

REDRESS (Resolve Employment Disputes Reach Equitable Solutions Swiftly) offers mediation as a voluntary alternative to the traditional EEO process. If the employee chooses mediation it is usually scheduled within two weeks. This program was designed in 1994 as a result of a class action lawsuit in Florida, and has since been expanded nationally. REDRESS uses neutral, external professionals to mediate EEO disputes. If an employee decides to participate, then management is mandated to attend the mediation.

The mediation process starts with a joint session, facilitated by a mediator, between employee and supervisor. If settlement is reached, it is binding on everyone and the EEO dispute is withdrawn. About 81 percent of EEO disputes mediated are either settled or withdrawn without filing a formal complaint. This rate is significantly higher than the rate of 44 percent for non-mediated cases. Although this difference may reflect in part a tendency for complainants to choose mediation if they are more amenable to settlement, overall the number of USPS EEO complaints reaching the formal complaint stage has fallen since REDRESS started, suggesting that the program has increased closures before the formal complaint stage.<sup>50</sup>

REDRESS is designed to increase participants' satisfaction with the fairness of the process by providing them with an opportunity to be heard, control over the process, and respectful treatment by the other party and the neutral mediator. Exit interviews conducted by an independent contractor show that more than 87 percent of employees, management, and employee representatives are satisfied or highly satisfied with the REDRESS process and more than 65 percent reported being satisfied or highly satisfied with the outcome.<sup>51</sup>

In 1999 REDRESS won an award from the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, and in 2000 it won an award from the American College of Civil Trial Mediators. USPS is currently expanding the program to make it available at the formal complaint state of the EEO process.

### **The Commission recommends that USPS management, unions, and management associations:**

- \* **Repair the dispute resolution processes, which are a major source of frustration for employees and managers, by developing ways to prevent grievance, EEO, and other complaints; resolving disputes quickly at the lowest level; and sharply reducing the backlog.**
- \* **Develop contract provisions to limit parallel filing of complaints in more than one system.**
- \* **Limit filing of multiple identical complaints, e.g., by using class action procedures.**
- \* **Use the new grievance tracking system to identify patterns in grievances.**
- \* **Continue to expand the use of mediation to resolve EEO complaints.**
- \* **Step up national summit meetings facilitated by the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, and efforts to develop joint long-term plans to improve the work climate.**

- \* **Initiate summit meetings at the local level.**
- \* **Expand joint training for management and union officials in contract interpretation, interpersonal skills, and violence awareness.**
- \* **Increase the use of independent counselors and investigators rather than USPS employees to handle EEO complaints.**

### **INCENTIVES FOR MANAGERS**

Legal limits on managers' compensation constrain USPS ability to attract, motivate, and retain the most effective managers. Even the Postmaster General earns less than mid-level managers at many private corporations.

What financial incentives exist have been seen as focused on financial performance and customer service. As one manager put it, "We're pushing so hard to get the numbers, to reduce nonproductive time, we can't take the time to think about how to improve the work and involve people."

Financial incentives for managers include pay raises based on individual performance evaluations and a variable pay program based on performance at the national, area, and performance cluster levels. In FY2000, USPS incorporated employee survey results into the variable pay program for managers. This means that employee survey results affect managers' pay. This positive step has already generated some constructive responses, such as increased recognition for craft employees. However, there is no requirement that individual performance evaluations for managers include measures of effective personnel management.

USPS currently has no method in place nationwide for managers to get feedback from peers or subordinates. A "Leadership Behavior Model" is in place at two sites. Managers at these sites assess their own leadership skills and receive anonymous feedback from subordinates through an outside consultant.

#### **The Commission recommends that USPS:**

- \* **Require that effective personnel management and communication be included in managers' individual performance evaluations, and develop mechanisms for managers to receive feedback from subordinates and peers.**
- \* **Continue using employee survey results to determine variable pay for managers.**

#### **INCENTIVES FOR CRAFT EMPLOYEES**

USPS does not evaluate performance of craft employees except during the probationary period. Many managers and craft employees believe that recognition programs are inadequate. Craft employees resent being excluded from the variable pay system. When asked about incentives to do a good job at the Postal Service, craft employees responded, "Managers get money, craft get nothing;" "Supervisors should share the bonuses with us...we're the ones carrying the mail;" and "The #1 way to make up time is not to take a lunch break. Every time you skip a lunch break, you're donating 30 minutes to your supervisor's bonus."

With no rewards for performance, most craft employees' incentives are opposite to managers' incentives, creating conflict and resentment. For example, if city carriers finish their route early, they are supposed to return to the office for additional assignments. Thus, there is no reward for working efficiently and no penalty for working inefficiently. The only way to get financial benefits is through overtime. Similarly, a mail handler or clerk has no financial incentive to sort mail efficiently. In contrast, rural carriers' salaries are based on an annual evaluation of their route. If they finish early they can go home, and if they finish late they do not get extra pay for that day.

Tools for measuring individual performance are limited, and daily conflicts over city letter carriers' workload are a particular source of friction. One local official of the National Association of Letter Carriers estimated that "50 percent of confrontations could be solved by the union and the post office meeting and coming up with a new process for handling [requests for overtime]." Similarly, a senior manager commented "Every morning there are thousands of discussions about how long the route is. Mostly it's just opinion vs. opinion." USPS has pilot programs in place to test alternatives to the current workload system for city letter carriers.

#### **The Commission recommends that USPS:**

- \* **Improve tools for individual workload and performance measurement, and provide individual performance feedback for craft employees.**
- \* **In partnership with the unions, develop performance-based financial incentives for craft employees, such as profit-sharing at the national or local level, pay-for-knowledge, individual performance evaluation with links to pay, increased use of recognition programs including cash and non-cash awards.**
- \* **In partnership with the National Association of Letter Carriers, develop new procedures to reduce daily conflicts between city letter carriers and supervisors over workload.**



## **STATUTORY PAY CEILING**

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. H.R. 22, currently under consideration by the House of Representatives, would allow USPS profits to be used for bonuses not subject to the statutory cap on postal salaries. This change would be a step in the right direction.



# Glossary

**American Postal Workers Union, AFL-CIO (APWU)** — Union representing more than 344,000 employees of the U.S. Postal Service who are clerks, maintenance employees, motor vehicle operators, and other employees.

**Area** — One of ten USPS administrative units covering a defined geographic area, headed by a vice president.

**Bargaining unit employee** — An employee who is represented by a labor union.

**Board of Governors** — Eleven-member board that oversees the Postal Service. Nine members appointed by the President select the Postmaster General, who joins the Board; together, they select the Deputy Postmaster General, who also joins the Board.

**City carrier** — A USPS letter carrier who provides delivery service within a city. There are more than 240,000 city carriers. The National Association of Letter Carriers represents city carriers.

**Clerk** — A USPS employee whose duties may include sorting mail, working at the post office windows, and performing general office duties. There are more than 280,000 clerks. The American Postal Workers Union represents clerks (as well as employees in other positions).

**Craft employee** — See *bargaining unit employee*.

**Crisis management team (CMT)** — Responds to violent incidents by caring for victims and their families, and establishing an orderly return to normal operations.

**CustomerPerfect!** — The Postal Service's framework for setting goals and measuring performance.

**District** — One of 85 postal administrative units that oversee operational and support functions

within a performance cluster. Headed by a district manager, who reports to an area vice president.

**Economic value added (EVA)** — Determines funding available for the USPS Variable Pay Program. EVA equals net operating income minus a charge for capital used.

**Employee assistance program (EAP)** — A voluntary counseling program that helps USPS employees recover from substance abuse and cope with mental, emotional, family, financial, and legal problems.

**Employee Workplace Intervention Analyst (EWIA)** — A USPS employee whose function is to identify systemic problems in the work environment and advise management about solutions.

**Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)** — Federal agency that enforces the principal federal statutes prohibiting employment discrimination.

**Executive and Administrative Schedule (EAS)** — A salary structure that applies to most managerial and administrative USPS employees.

**Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS)** — Independent federal agency that promotes sound and stable labor-management relations.

**First-level supervisor** — A supervisor who oversees craft employees. See also *line supervisor*.

**Fitness-for-duty exam (FFD)** — An exam performed when a concern arises about whether an employee can perform his or her job safely. The exam may address physical or psychiatric concerns, or both, and considers danger to self or to others.

**General Accounting Office (GAO)** — The investigative arm of Congress.

**Headquarters (HQ)** — The national USPS unit that directs administration, policy, and operations.

**Line Supervisor** — A supervisor who oversees craft employees. See also *first-level supervisor*.

**Mail handler** — A USPS employee who moves and processes mail. There are more than 61,000 mail handlers. The National Postal Mail Handlers Union represents mail handlers.

**Merit performance evaluation** — USPS's system for assessing individual performance of non-craft employees.

**Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB)** — Federal agency that considers appeals from federal employees regarding removals and other major personnel actions.

**National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC)** — Union representing more than 240,000 city letter carriers working for USPS.

**National Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU)** — Union representing more than 61,000 mail handlers working for USPS.

**National Rural Letter Carriers' Association (NRLCA)** — Union representing more than 55,000 career rural letter carriers and 57,000 substitute, associate, auxiliary, and relief carriers working for USPS.

**Office of Inspector General (OIG)** — Agency established in 1996 to prevent, detect, and report fraud, waste, and program abuse, and to promote efficiency in the operations of the Postal Service. The Inspector General is independent of postal management.

**Office of Personnel Management (OPM)** — The federal government's human resources agency.

**Performance cluster (PC)** — One of 85 USPS administrative units covering a defined geographic area. Includes customer service (post offices) and mail processing (plants). See also district.

**Postal Career Executive Service (PCES)** — Includes approximately 800 senior postal managers including district, area, and headquarters executives (Level I), and approximately 40 USPS officers, including vice presidents (Level II).

**Postal Inspection Service (PIS)** — The federal law enforcement agency of the USPS that investigates criminal acts against the mails and misuse of the postal system and protects postal employees, mail, funds, and property.

**Postal Rate Commission (PRC)** — Presidentially appointed five-member agency that sets postal rates.

**Postal Reorganization Act of 1970 (PRA)** — Statute that established USPS as an independent federal agency.

**Postmaster** — The manager in charge of a post office.

**Probationary period** — Initial trial period of employment.

**Register of eligibles (hiring register)** — A list of applicants for USPS vacancies, ranked by test scores.

**Resolve Employment Disputes Reach Equitable Solutions Swiftly (REDRESS)** — USPS program that uses mediation as an alternative to resolve equal employment opportunity complaints.

**Rural carrier** — A USPS employee assigned to deliver and collect all mail classes in rural communities lacking convenient postal facilities. The National Rural Letter Carriers' Association represents more than 55,000 career rural carriers and 57,000 substitute, associate, auxiliary, and relief carriers.

**Threat assessment team (TAT)** — Team responsible for identifying threateners, assessing risk, and developing plans to reduce risk.

**Veterans' preference** — Preference in hiring and other aspects of federal employment provided by law to certain veterans who are disabled or who served on active duty in the armed forces during certain specified time periods or in military campaigns.

**Voice of the Business (VOB)** — Financial performance. One of three dimensions of USPS's CustomerPerfect! framework and the Variable Pay Program.

**Voice of the Customer (VOC)** — Customer service. One of three dimensions of USPS's CustomerPerfect! framework and the Variable Pay Program.

**Voice of the Employee (VOE)** — Employee satisfaction and well-being. One of three dimensions of USPS's CustomerPerfect! framework and the Variable Pay Program.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> USPS, *Postal News*, "U.S. Postal Service Commission on A Safe and Secure Workplace Formed; Headed by Former HEW Secretary Joseph A. Califano, Jr.," Press Release, October 6, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States 1998*, Uniform Crime Reports, U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.

<sup>3</sup> USPS (1999), Annual Report.

<sup>4</sup> USPS Diversity Business Plan, January 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Figures from the Commission's survey.

<sup>6</sup> Figures from the Commission's survey.

<sup>7</sup> USPS provided USPS figures on veterans' preference. The percentages of veterans at USPS and in the national workforce are from the Commission's survey. Federal figures are from "Federal Civilian Workforce Statistics: Demographic Profile of the Federal Workforce as of 9/30/98," Office of Personnel Management, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> United Parcel Service: Definitive Proxy Statement DEFA14A, Filed 3/22/00, Table 2, [www.FreeEdgar.com](http://www.FreeEdgar.com).

Federal Express: Definitive Proxy Statement DEFA14A, Filed 8/16/99, Table 5, [www.FreeEdgar.com](http://www.FreeEdgar.com).

<sup>9</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries Summary," U.S. Department of Labor, Press Release August 4, 1999, "Occupational Injuries and Illnesses and Work-Related Fatalities, Technical Note," *Compensation and Working Conditions*, Winter 1999, and Eric F. Sygnatur and Guy A. Toscano, "Work-Related Homicides: The Facts," *Compensation and Working Conditions*, Spring 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Homicide Trends in the United States*, [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/homicide](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/homicide).

<sup>11</sup> American Dialect Society, Words of the Year, [www.americandialect.org](http://www.americandialect.org), January 27, 2000.

<sup>12</sup> *Postal Life*, January 1997.

<sup>13</sup> *Washington Post*, November 7, 1999, p. A3.

<sup>14</sup> *Washington Post*, January 13, 2000, p. E5.

<sup>15</sup> *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 9, 2000, [www.postnet.com](http://www.postnet.com).

<sup>16</sup> *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, January 13, 1999, p. B1.

<sup>17</sup> *Mansfield News Journal*, October 27, 1999, p. 5A.

<sup>18</sup> *Postal Link*, December 11, 1998.

<sup>19</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, "Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries Summary," August 4, 1999 (press release) and Guy Toscano and Janice A. Windau, "Profile of Fatal Work Injuries in 1996," *Compensation and Working Conditions*, Spring 1998, pp. 37-45.

<sup>20</sup> The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) collects data on all workplace fatalities, including homicides, using death certificates, workers' compensation records, and reports to federal and state agencies. The data, known as the Census of Fatal

Occupational Injuries (CFOI), include fatalities that occur while the victim is "at work; on the work premises; while in work status; or due to an association with the decedent's employment, including interpersonal interactions, even if the incident occurs outside of the workplace." (Eric F. Sygnatur and Guy A. Toscano, "Work-Related Homicides: The Facts," *Compensation and Working Conditions* Vol. 5, No. 1, Spring 2000.) The data identify the victim's occupation and industry and the victim's relationship with the offender, if known. To compare homicide rates at USPS with homicides nationally, we combined the CFOI data with BLS data on the number of workers by industry. We made corrections to the CFOI data on postal homicides based on information from the Postal Inspection Service. Specifically, we reclassified two cases in which the CFOI incorrectly classified the victims as postal employees and added one case the CFOI missed. The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) began collecting data on workplace deaths earlier than the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The NIOSH data begin in 1980 but extend only through 1995. The NIOSH database is derived from death certificates only, and is less complete than the CFOI, including 14 percent fewer cases for the years in which both data sources are available. In addition, the NIOSH database does not identify current or former coworkers as perpetrators. For these reasons, we relied primarily on the CFOI data.

A published analysis of the NIOSH data ("Occupational Injury Deaths of Postal Workers, United States, 1980-1989," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Review*, Vol. 43, No. 32, 587-595, 1994) found that the rate of workplace homicide for postal employees was the same as the national rate for 1983-1989 (0.6 per 100,000). However, the postal rate for this period was heavily influenced by one incident in which 14 postal employees were killed. Excluding this one extreme case would reduce the postal rate to 0.4 per 100,000, close to the rate of 0.3 per 100,000 for the 1992-1998 period.

<sup>21</sup> In the Standard Industry Classification, USPS is included under Transportation. Our calculations exclude USPS from Transportation in order to show it separately. Following Standard Industry Classification guidelines, private postal services include the following Standard Industrial Classification categories: private postal services primarily engaged in

the delivery of unaddressed advertising materials; direct mail advertising services; local trucking with and without storage; trucking except local; courier services, except by air; air transportation; and air courier services. These categories fall under a number of major industries, and in our calculations they are included within these major industries and are shown separately as well.

<sup>22</sup> Calculations using 1992-1998 CFOI.

<sup>23</sup> Calculations using 1992-1998 CFOI.

<sup>24</sup> Calculations using 1992-1998 CFOI.

<sup>25</sup> Eric F. Sygnatur and Guy A. Toscano, "Work-Related Homicides: The Facts," *Compensation and Working Conditions*, Spring 2000.

<sup>26</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States 1998*, Uniform Crime Reports, Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.

<sup>27</sup> Some published reports do not clearly distinguish between homicides committed by perpetrators known to be non-employees, and homicides committed by unknown perpetrators, e.g., "National Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 1997," *Fatal Workplace Injuries in 1997: A Collection of Data and Analysis*, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, July 1999.

<sup>28</sup> We included in our analysis all homicides meeting the Bureau of Labor Statistics definition of a work-related fatality, as well as one case in which the perpetrator was a postal employee who was on duty and on site at the time of the homicide, but the victim was not a postal employee.

<sup>29</sup> This description is based on news accounts.

<sup>30</sup> Jeffrey W. Swanson *et al.*, "Violence and Psychiatric Disorder in the Community: Evidence from the Epidemiologic Catchment Area Surveys," *Hospital and Community Psychiatry*, Vol. 41, No. 7, July 1990.

<sup>31</sup> Delbert Elliott, "Youth Violence: An Overview," CSPV Paper 008, [www.colorado.edu/cspv/infohour/youth-violence.html](http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/infohour/youth-violence.html), paper presented at the Aspen Institute's Children's Policy Forum, "Children and Violence Conference," February 18-21, 1994, Queenstown, Maryland, Delbert Elliott, "Violent Offending Over the Life Course: A Sociological Perspective," prepared for Office of Behavioral and Social Science Research, Rockville, Maryland, June 16, 1996, revised September 1998.

<sup>32</sup> This description is based on news accounts.

<sup>33</sup> USPS does not keep statistics on veterans; only veterans' preference, a narrower category, is tracked. Therefore this comparison uses workforce figures from the Commission's 1999 survey of postal employees. In 1999, 29 percent of postal employees were preference-eligible veterans, compared with 35 percent who were veterans in the survey. The actual

proportion of postal employees who were veterans during the 1986-1999 period is probably higher than the 1999 figure used here, since preference-eligible veterans (and presumably veterans) have been declining as a proportion of the USPS workforce over the period. This means that the difference between veterans as a proportion of male perpetrators and veteran as a proportion of the male workforce is likely smaller than estimated here.

<sup>34</sup> The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, *Behind Bars: Substance Abuse and America's Prison Population*, New York, January, 1998.

<sup>35</sup> Calculations using 1998 National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS).

<sup>36</sup> Calculations using 1993-1998 NCVS.

<sup>37</sup> Calculations using 1993-1998 NCVS.

<sup>38</sup> The most important difference in design between our survey and the NCVS is that ours is a one-time survey, whereas the NCVS interviews the same people over and over. When the NCVS asks a respondent whether an event has happened in the past six months, the period is bounded by a previous interview. So respondents are not likely to include events that might have happened, say, seven or eight months ago. In a one-time survey there is no such boundary, and people may "telescope" their memory of events, including earlier events when asked about experiences in the past year. In addition, the NCVS uses in-person and telephone interviewing, and focuses on criminal behavior. While it is not possible to quantify the effects of each of these differences, they prevent valid comparisons between our survey and the NCVS.

<sup>39</sup> Arnold H. Buss and Mark Perry, "The Aggression Questionnaire," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 1992, Vol. 63, No. 3, pp. 452-459.

<sup>40</sup> Government employees include respondents in the national sample who reported working in standard industrial classification categories including executive offices, legislative bodies, executive and legislative offices combined, and general government; courts, police enforcement, legal counsel and prosecution, correctional institutions, fire protection, and other public order and safety; and national security and international affairs.

<sup>41</sup> Cases with insufficient evidence to warrant administrative or other action are not included.

<sup>42</sup> *National Coordination Audit: USPS Hiring Practices*, January, 1997, U.S. Postal Inspection Service, Case No. 034-1186646-PA(1).

*National Hiring Practices Review*, Postal Inspection Service, November 1994.

*Employee Background Checks*, General Accounting Office, September 1993.



*Audit Report: USPS Hiring Process, Final Report*, U.S. Postal Inspection Service, September, 1992, 026-1084324-AO(1).

*Postal Service: Screening for Applicants for Employment*, General Accounting Office, June 1988.

*Postal Service Employment*, General Accounting Office, June 1988.

<sup>43</sup> USPS, *Threat Assessment Team Guide*, Publication 108, May 1997.

<sup>44</sup> Grammar and punctuation edited for clarity.

<sup>45</sup> Joseph Kinney and Barbara Lambert. National Safe Workplace Institute, *Mandating Psychological Evaluation of Employees*, NSWI Best Practice, No. 96-1, 1996.

<sup>46</sup> *Towards Postal Excellence, The Report of the President's Commission on Postal Organization*, Annex (Contractors' Reports) Volume 1, p. 61.

<sup>47</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *Labor-Management Problems Persist on the Workroom Floor*, Washington, D.C., September 1994.

<sup>48</sup> USPS OIG, *USPS Labor and Management Workplace Disputes*, March 31, 1999, LR-AR-99-001. Estimate attributed to Postmaster General Marvin Runyon.

<sup>49</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *Briefing Report to Congressional Requesters: Equal Employment Opportunity: Rising Trends in EEO Complaint Caseloads in the Federal Sector*, July 1998.

<sup>50</sup> Lisa B. Bingham and Mikaela Cristina Novac, "Mediation's Impact on Formal Discrimination Complaint Filing: Before and After the REDRESS Program at the United States Postal Service," submitted to the International Association of Conflict Management Conference, St. Louis, Missouri, June 18-21, 2000, and Mary S. Elcano, "Overview of REDRESS Mediation Program," Brown & Wood LLP, June 2000.

<sup>51</sup> Mary S. Elcano, "Overview of REDRESS Mediation Program," Brown & Wood LLP, June 2000.

