

## **Postal Service starts discussions on early retirement offers**

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The U.S. Postal Service has started meeting with unions to discuss the voluntary early retirements it expects to offer to at least 20,000 clerks and mail handlers in response to a decreasing volume of mail, an agency spokesman said Thursday.

Representatives from the American Postal Workers Union met with USPS officials on Wednesday to discuss the agency's plan for the voluntary retirements. APWU President William Burrus said USPS is required to bargain with the union over such programs.

"We do not oppose voluntary early retirements, but we do object to any plan to offer them selectively and exclude some employees from eligibility," Burrus said. "We also believe that for this VER, which is not the result of contract negotiations, severance pay must accompany an offer of early retirement."

The Office of Personnel Management on Tuesday approved USPS' request to create a voluntary retirement program for employees in the clerk, mail handler and some supervisory positions, said David Partenheimer, a USPS spokesman.

"The OPM action is only a first step," he said. "It authorizes us to offer the early retirements, but we need to work out the details."

Partenheimer said the number of employees affected will depend on eligibility requirements and other details of the program that remain under development. The agency has not yet established a timeline, he said.

The move comes after an announcement by USPS in late June that it would implement a reorganization plan designed to streamline agency operations. Partenheimer said the agency needs fewer employees because of continuing automation and technological advances as well as a drop in mail volume.

Partenheimer said USPS is "consulting with all the affected unions on this issue."

A spokesman for another major union representing postal employees -- the National Association of Letter Carriers -- said Thursday that the union is waiting for more information before commenting.

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