

Confessions of a Data Collector



Since January 8, I have been in Hyattsville, MD with three other NALC members and four members of management, working as a data collector in a joint NALC/USPS, FSS work methods study. The eight of us, along with twenty carriers in the 20784 and 20782 zones, are collecting data involving different methods of handling residual mail and sequenced mail in an FSS, Flat Sequencing System (DPS flats) receiving office. The carriers in the study create their “FSS” mail by casing AFSM mail (tub flats from the plant), bundled standard mail and second-class bundles. This mail is then pulled down and placed in the actual trays used in the FSS machine. The remaining “residual” mail is then cased, letters and flats, in various ways. It is cased in the regular carrier case or it’s cased into a single, low volume (LVC) piece of casing equipment or into a “sculch” tray. These various pieces of equipment can be viewed on our website.

The study also involves how to handle sequenced mailings on park and loop routes with FSS mail. The various studies to date have included the following ways of working with sequenced mailings. 1. The residual mail is cased into the regular carrier case and then it is pulled down and merged with the sequenced mailing. 2. The residual mail is cased into the regular carrier case. This mail is then merged with the FSS mail. The sequenced mail is carried as a third bundle. 3. The sequenced mail is cased in the regular carrier case and then the residual mail is cased with the sequenced mail.

In the # 1 and #3 scenario described above, the carrier is in a situation where he/she is required to carry DPS, FSS and the mixed residual/sequenced bundle. This results in carriers with two mixed letter and flat bundles (FSS and residual/sequenced), with one of these bundles on the arm, the DPS in your hand and the other bundle in your satchel. In these situations you would be virtually forced to carry the mail in this way. Working two bundles of this type of mail from your satchel would be a problem, in my opinion. In the # 2 scenario, the merged bundle and the sequenced bundle could be carried in the satchel together, if we chose to do so. Other scenarios have involved casing residual mail into

the low volume case, pulling it down and placing it in a tray and then merging it with the FSS mail and casing residual mail into the sculch tray and merging this mail with the FSS mail, either in the office or on the street.

A member of the data collection team is with each carrier all day, counting the mail, recording the time used for different work functions and walking the route with the carrier. All the carriers involved in the study dislike the sculch tray. It’s poorly designed, poorly labeled and it should be an embarrassment to USPS Engineering, who has their department name stamped not once, but twice, on the tray. The American Heritage dictionary defines sculch as “a person or thing not highly regarded”. You can’t make stuff like this up! At least USPS Engineering has a sense of humor.

The carriers that I have had the pleasure of working with have been professional and hard working. They have physical park and loop routes that have delivery times of five to six hours or more. Kim, Rob, Kevin F., Chris, Dorian, Tyrone, Damon, Logan, Donald, Joe, Michelle H., Paul, Jennifer and Kevin C. will have endured three months of being followed, timed and observed. They have cased mail in numerous different ways and merged mail into the FSS in the office, on the street, in the rain and cold. They have been amazing and they are one and all, terrific letter carriers doing a difficult job. All the members of the data collection team appreciate their cooperation and mostly good-natured participation. I know their supervisors think highly of their work because they are given extra deliveries to do, on overtime, even when they aren’t on the ODL and if they return after 1800 they are given some type of letter of recognition. I think that’s what it is anyway.

We complete our data collection in early April. The information will be used to assist the joint FSS USPS/NALC Task Force in coming to an agreement concerning the work methods to be used in an office that receives FSS mail. I hope that the final decision will take into consideration the physical impact of the increased street time that an FSS office is likely to experience and the ability of letter carriers to make their own intelligent decisions on the best way for them to adapt to this challenging environment. We should be given options not orders regarding the handling of this mail.

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