

We understand there have been cuts in time spent – in overtime, and in extra trips - such that letter carriers can't wait even 10 minutes for mail to be sorted before they leave, and this has resulted in a backlog of undelivered mail. In mid August, some people in Chicago were reporting waiting weeks for their mail. Will this affect Voting by Mail in Illinois?

M: In the news there were messages from the Post Master General PMG that there may be cuts in overtime and mail to be held back in delivery, but since he made that statement that has been recanted. But we were having some delivery issues in regard to COVID 19. We were affected just like other industries but since that time and for the election there will be no cuts in overtime, and mail will resume and be delivered according to our delivery standards.

J: Yes We were affected heavily by COVID and also by decisions that were made by our Post Master General (PMG) when he first took charge of the postal service. But because of all the public uproar, it was recanted like Michele said. And he put it in writing. Here is the link:

<https://link.usps.com/2020/08/18/election-mail/> This is the public statement that the PMG made to the American people that overtime has been resumed. Regarding mail sorting equipment and mail boxes, so far in Illinois I have not seen any report that machines were taken out from Illinois. I know that this was seen in the news in the Iowa area, and I cannot speak about what happened in Iowa. But no mail processing facilities will be closed. This is part of the statement. No retail offices will be closed, and hours of the post office will not change. This is the intent until the election. Now what happens after the election, we are standing by – it depends on what the PMG obviously will decide about the operations of our organization.

We have seen news reports about removing essential equipment – that at least two dozen high-volume mail sorting machines in the area have been removed and destroyed, and mail boxes were removed. Were mail-sorting machines and mailboxes in Illinois removed? Is there any chance they will be returned? Will this affect Voting by Mail in Illinois?

J: Like I said earlier, we only look at the reports given to us. In Illinois, this is one good thing I can say – my husband works for the postal service. He is a mechanic, and he is the one fixing all those mail-processing machines. He works in the big plant in Palatine, IL And I asked him, “Is there any machine that was taken out from that facility?” He said there was 1, but only because that machine is broken, and it will be replaced. But so far with all the reports and meetings that we are having with our leadership in the Great Lakes area, and especially in Illinois, I have not seen a report, and I go by the reports that any mail processing machines, other than the one broken in Palatine, have been taken out.

As far as blue boxes, like I say I look at reports, and – unless it's not being shared. No reports are saying that mail boxes have been touched or removed in the south suburban or central Illinois district. I'm from Chicago, and I drive around Chicago – I still see the same mail boxes whether it's a residential area or a metro area. I'm still seeing the same mailboxes that I've seen for 30 years. So if it is happening, then I have not seen it in any report.

M: The only thing I have to add is that our Post Master General, who is Louis DeJoy, made a special statement to our internal newsletter on August 18, and just to quote what he's saying, he wants to "assure all Americans of the following: This is public information. Retail hours at the post office will not change. Mail processing equipment and blue boxes will remain where they are. No processing facilities will be closed." And he reasserts that "overtime has and will continue to be approved as needed."

There was a posting on facebook stating that machines in Carole Stream had been removed. Not one but multiple machines.

M: I can't address that because I work just in Chicago. I'm not aware of any machine removal from Carole Stream. And if it did happen, according to the Postmaster General it has to be put back – it needs to remain where it is. I can only go from what the Postmaster General addressed – that the machines will remain where they are and operable.

J: And I didn't hear anything about Carole Stream. The one I spoke about earlier is Palatine, which is close to the Carole Stream area. We only rely on the reports being shared with us. I work in South Suburban – closer to Oak Lawn – and there is no machine taken out from there. But for the other plants we just go by the reports.

We have heard that election mail is to be treated like "bulk" mail – not like first class, so it can be discarded if not immediately delivered. Does adding a first class stamp cause the ballot to be handled as first class mail instead of bulk?

M: Let me clarify what bulk mail is. Bulk mail is a work share program which is really commercial mail. And it's a discounted program because the mailer does part of the work for the postal service. Our classes of mail are first class mail and marketing mail. First class mail has different delivery standards – 2-3 days, and our marketing mail, which most people consider our bulk mail, has a delivery standard of 3-7 days. So if you put a 1st class stamp on your return ballot, you will be in the 1st class mail delivery standards. Now for marketing mail, the delivery standards are a little different but if it is political mail, we've always suggested using what we call a political Tag 57 and it provides visibility. But if the class of mail is marketing mail, it is subjected to the marketing mail delivery standards. It's not held, and actually to be completely honest, inside of processing, if it's identifies with the red political tag, it gets expedited service. Now the election officials and the election Board – any outbound mailings that they prepare and any mailings that they're expecting to come back through the mail as the ballot is identified with an official mail logo on each piece. So there's no holding of the mail. There's no slower delivery standard, and those pieces ARE treated as first class mail. Whether or not there is a stamp. Because most of the time there are 3 ways they get it back. Business reply, Courtesy Reply, Meter reply, and now what we have is Share Mail. And all of those fall in the class of 1st Class mail.

J: And to add to that if I may Political mail is very different from election mail. Political mail is Campaign Mailing – like "Vote for XX" That is Political Mail. Or Planned Parenthood - anything that is political in nature is what we call political mail. And we do tag that with Political Tag 57. Now Election mail is a different tag – it is Tag 191. I believe that all counties that I work with – and I believe there are 102 counties – I work with 42 counties --we highly recommend "Please use 1st Class Mail." And a majority of them did. And 1st Class mail is a very different delivery standard than marketing mail. Marketing mail is

the one that you receive at your doorstep for the pizza place or your nail salon. That's the same standard as "bulk mail" as you call it. But Election Mail is definitely prioritized. We don't hold them whether there's postage or not - that will go to the county.

M – Yes. That's right. This has been instructed through headquarters – return Ballot mail – whether it's postage due, or no postage - is required not to be held, and it must be delivered.

In Chicago we've put some really good processes in place for the outbound ballot and also the mail that is coming back. We've developed dedicated mail processing bins that only distribute the ballots going out or the ballots coming in. It's better to handle. There's no comingling with regular delivery mail. We isolate it. We quarantine it. And also we stage it. And we allow the election officials to put transportation in place so they can come and actually pick up the ballots.

J: We gave the county officials all these tips – election mail must have the election logo for visibility. If it has that election logo and you did not put a stamp that would be delivered automatically. So we gave them that and we said "We have mail design analysts that would be assigned" if they asked for assistance. I would even make sure that they are being contacted by this analyst to make sure that the barcode is in place, the election logo is there. And we're doing everything we can to make sure the election mail is separated from our regular mail when it comes to processing.

If a ballot is returned without postage, who pays for that? Is the local Election Authority charged for the postage?

Yes. They're responsible for the postage.

We have heard that some state's election deadlines are considered "too tight" for USPS delivery standards. Is that true in Illinois?

M: I can't really answer that because we don't set the time line – the cut offs – for the election board. I believe for the primary the cut off to request a ballot was the Thursday prior to the election. Would I say that's cutting it close? Yeah, because we don't have Sunday delivery, and the election is on a Tuesday. We're expecting way more than normal volumes going outbound and coming back – the ballots. So there are some suggested mailing dates and times to meet the election day.

J: We've discussed that with the Illinois State Board of Elections (ISBE) and with the 4 zone presidents for Illinois, and when The ISBE Brent Davis had mentioned that the General Assembly had approved the dates, and the last one is October 29 – our leadership said "That's kinda tight with the delivery standard that we have." But that's why we have met with all of the counties, and we've discussed "Please encourage your voters to mail it early because all mail will be processed in the same machines – not just election mail but regular mail – our bills and all that." So yes, it's kinda tight, and I believe the PMG had said, "I am announcing today (August 18) the expansion of our current leadership task force on election mail to enhance our ongoing work and partnership with state and local election officials in jurisdictions throughout the country. Leaders of our postal unions and management associations have committed to joining this task force to ensure strong coordination throughout our organization because of the unprecedented demands of the 2020 election. This task force will help ensure that election officials and voters are well-informed and fully supported by the postal service."

Why is the Post Office recommending that people mail their ballots by October 19?

M: I'm not aware of an Oct. 19 date, but what I can say is that all outbound ballots that are going to the voter is done through commercial mail, with the exception of the business mail entry unit. The business mail entry units have so many processes to ensure that the mail is processed and delivered to the voter on time. If you are mailing very close to the election date, they have processes in place that whoever is dropping the mail – they have to sign off on a form making them aware that this might not reach the voter or be delivered in time for the election. And for 1st class mail they give you a suggested delivery mail date of 5 days prior to election and for marketing mail they give you a suggested date – you can mail before the date.

Based on my 19 years of experience with mailing requirement, this is not going to be due to COVID – if we didn't have COVID in place –it might still run a normal election as far as mail-in-ballots - but due to COVID I believe that more people will want to vote by mail – thank God we have that option – than to go into a polling place. So we know that the volumes will probably be much higher than normal. So that's why we're saying the earlier the better. Also, it's almost the same as peak season and we've got COVID with online packages, and that's why we're extending it out with the suggested date of October.

I just read that nearly 1 million Illinois voters have already requested mail ballots. Is the Illinois State Board of Elections or any county clerk's offices doing anything to alert USPS about areas of the state where they have processed an especially high number of mail ballot requests? Would knowing this information have an impact on how quickly post offices are able to get ballots to voters and process them once they're returned?

J: We actively engage all of our county clerks. We have this information that we use. The L2 data is done by this consulting firm, and the postal service has that information. And it shows per county how many registered voters. Just for example in Will County, according to the L2 data of 2019, there are approximately 457,000 registered voters. So when I engage the Will County Clerk, they would tell me how much they sent. They said they sent an exact number- 456 thousand and something – out. And they gave me a percentage of what they're expecting back. So with that information that I have from the County Clerk, I pass that along to our postmasters or our leadership. I put that in the file that Will County is expecting 60% out of the number they sent, and then they are going to be sending this, so we have a general idea about the percentage. So per county we could actually generate that information from the L2 data of how many registered voters. For the whole Illinois L2 for 2019 it's a little less than 8 million voters. So I am also working with the Secretary of State, because I know that they are sending the Constitutional Amendment pamphlet September 1st. They're sending to about 5.5 million households in Illinois. I'm working with them on that to make sure that it goes on a timely fashion. And after that they will be sending ballot application reminders to the voters of Illinois. So there are two (ballot application reminders). One is September 15 and one is October 15. So two reminders from the Secretary of State.

How many USPS postal workers are currently not working due to having COVID or the need to be quarantined? Please respond as a percentage of work force specific to Illinois.

M: I haven't received that information. In my position that information is not shared on any of our internal applications. So I cannot give an answer

J: Our leadership is not sharing that information with us.

Given what you have stated, should we expect that our mail will be received on a more regular basis as it was in the past?

J: We certainly hope so. Like I said, the overtime is back – I know that for a fact, because my husband is doing overtime. And we have a lot of friends in different departments and yes they're doing overtime. But here's one of the problems that we have. Yes, there is overtime, but there are also people that are not at work. We don't know the percentage of people that are off, but there are people that are off. So let's say in one postal station that there are 3 letter carriers that are off. They have to cover for those 3 delivery areas for those 3 carriers. And that would be overtime for maybe 5 different carriers compensating for those 3 carriers that are sick or off. So even though it's overtime that we're doing, sometimes it's just covering or compensating for our sick employees who are off or others who are not there. So right now I get mail every day. Last month, yes there was a problem with my mail. I did not receive mail – it was occasional – and I know there was a problem, but when MY mail was affected, I said "That really was a problem!" Because as you know all of us are consumers of mail. So right now – for the last two weeks - I've been getting mail every day. So I hope everyone is experiencing the same thing.

M: But if I could add. We got an EXTREMELY large amount of unexpected package mail. We've had more packages during COVID when everything was closed – everybody was online. We have twice the volume that we usually have during our Christmas peak season. And that contributed a lot to slow delivery of mail with packages. But the post office I know in Chicago is constantly hiring carriers – more and more carriers – they are constantly turning over carriers.

J: on the USPS website there are jobs that are posted throughout the nation because of the election mail and also the pandemic. We were told that they were hiring 35,000 more employees nationwide, but I don't have that in writing. These are questions that are also being asked by a lot of our colleagues – if we are so busy, what is the leadership doing? Are they hiring help? We always hire help in the peak season and as Michele said earlier – we are not just in double peak. We are in triple peak. It's like more than Christmas – especially with packages. Because everyone is ordering because of COVID-19. So yes they are hiring. That was like 2 months ago that they talked about there were applications that they wanted on the website. But now I have not visited the website, so I cannot tell if they are still hiring there, but I know that 2 months ago they were hiring.

Does Southern Illinois get their mail sorted in St. Louis, for example Edwardsville?

J: Yes. So parts of Illinois are part of the gateway district. So the postal service is divided into different districts. So parts of the northern Illinois are in an Iowa district and 600 zip codes in northern Illinois are part of Wisconsin. Chicago is 606 and parts of 607. Central Illinois is 604 up to 627. Peoria is being processed here in Illinois. And so are Champaign and Bloomington. The Springfield mail is 627, and it is being processed in Missouri and so is Edwardsville.

If there is delayed or no delivery of mail, what is the best way to follow up?

M: It depends. I work very closely with the Chicago Board of Elections, so if they perceived a delay or a delivery with ballots or return ballots they normally would call me, and I will work internally with the different units. But if it's something that you mailed or a package that you are expecting I would start with my local delivery post office. If there's no resolution there, they have station managers, they have supervisors, postmasters.

J: I highly recommend Informed Delivery. Informed Delivery is giving you a snapshot of your incoming mail going to your mailbox before that letter is in your mailbox. So every morning you will get an email from the postal service. You could check it 3 ways – you could download the Informed Delivery App. This is a free feature – you don't have to pay for it. You could sign up at usps.com and every morning you would see a snapshot of the envelope that is coming to your mailbox. So let's say today I saw a bill is coming – it would say there in 2-3 days it will come to your mailbox. Sometimes I get it today. Sometimes the next day. But if you don't get it in 3-4 days below the website you could report that mail missing by 1 click, and it would go straight for investigation. So I highly recommend that you go to usps.com and sign up for Informed Delivery. There are 30+ million users. You would see your ballot coming in. You would see what kind of mail you're getting, what kind of packages you're getting. It's very useful.