

COLORADO



LOCAL 321

NATIONAL POSTAL MAIL HANDLERS UNION

Division of the Laborer's International Union of North America,
AFL-CIO

1833 WEST ELK PLACE - DENVER, COLORADO 80211

Office 1-303-455-6400 Fax 1-303-455-5810 Watts 1-800-521-5094 TDD 1-303-455-6400



~~FOR YOUR INFORMATION~~

April 3, 2009

The National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health Evaluates AFSM100 Duties in the Denver General Mail Facility

The National Institute for Occupational Safety (NIOSH) conducts occupational research (often making recommendations) in order to prevent health and safety problems in the workplace.

NIOSH is part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, (CDC). They are not the enforcement authority. They study, observe, evaluate and recommend improvement or change. The long anticipated visit from the NIOSH staff is complete. NIOSH was in Denver for 3 days beginning on April 1, 2009, in response to employee concerns about tasks associated with the AFSM100. NIOSH paid particular attention to repetitive nature of the flat preparation work stations duties.

OSHA officials elected not to participate in the NIOSH Health Hazard Evaluation (HHE), instead preserving their rights as an enforcement agency.

This Local Union has repeatedly raised concerns about the lack of a proper rotation on AFSM100 duties in Denver for many months to no avail. It is frustrating to the Union that these problems could not be worked out amicably through the Ergonomic Risk Reduction Process (ERRP).

In addition to the ERRP, the Union attempted resolution through various levels of safety and health discussions and the grievance process. Despite these efforts, management balked at a proper rotation that would include the FTS positions.

During the Health Hazard Evaluation process, NIOSH officials interviewed 28 employees over the course of 2 days and 3 tours. Most employees had direct working knowledge of the AFSM100 duties. In addition, the requestor, the Unions and the Postal Service were afforded an opportunity to go on record during the HHE.

NIOSH also video taped each AFSM100 task at least twice while running a variety of flat mail types throughout the course of the HHE. In addition, NIOSH reviewed specific injuries; diagnosis and physical problems linked to the AFSM100 duties. NIOSH reviewed OSHA recordable injuries as well as Musculoskeletal Disorders tied to AFSM100 duties.

The NIOSH Medical Officer reviewed medical records of injured employees and even conducted confidential interviews with selected individuals. In short, NIOSH collected vast amounts of information that will be studied in great detail before issuing a final report. It is expected to take more than one year before NIOSH releases their final opinion.

During the course of the interview process, NIOSH reported that the most common complaints were linked to:

- inadequate staffing;

- inadequate rotation between the flat sorter functions;
- overfull flat tubs;
- dull cutter blades; and
- the reluctance to report a workplace injury under the threat of disciplinary action.

During the exit interview, NIOSH officials made several immediate recommendations. They questioned why flat prep cutting blades were not changed out more frequently, or made more readily available. Management agreed to immediately rectify this problem. New blades will be made available for each shift, rather than only once per 24 hour period.

NIOSH also addressed rotation concerns noting that this was a very difficult topic to address given the varying staffing demands and fluctuating mail volumes from day to day. Nevertheless, NIOSH recommended utilizing the Flat Tray Sorting System (FTS) as part of the task rotation in the AFSM100/section, but noted that a much more detailed analysis was necessary and forthcoming.

NIOSH also identified concerns about how employees might identify and report bins that repeatedly overfill. It was agreed that maintenance will respond to these complaints, and make appropriate adjustments as necessary.

Finally, NIOSH noted that they would be focusing more on specific task recommendations as opposed to the overall rotation problems. However they did recognize that staffing shortages negatively effect rotation, noting that simply shifting from flat prep station 1 to flat prep station 2 is not a rotation.

NIOSH officials noted that they may return for a follow-up visit if additional data is necessary. They also reminded the parties that the final Health Hazard Evaluation report for not be issued for more than one year.

Until then, continue to work safe. I am hopeful that management will now be more willing to include the FTS positions into the AFSM100 rotation.

If your cutter blade becomes dull, request a new one from your immediate supervisor. Dull blades add resistance to the motion. Cutting hundreds or thousands bundles with a dull blade over the course of a week will only add to the problem.

As always, work safe. Additional information will be posted as it becomes available.

In Unity, *Mike*

Michael J Hora
President, NPMHU Local 321